

“In Adam” or “In Christ”
Romans 5:12-21
4-12-2026

As we return to chapter 5 of Romans this morning, Paul moves from his discussion of justification to identification.

From salvation by faith through the blood of Jesus, to freedom from sin and death through the gift of life and grace found in Jesus Christ

As Wiersbe put it, the key thought of the passage we’re looking at this morning is that when God looks upon the human race, He sees but two men—Adam and Christ. Every human being is either “in Adam” and lost, or “in Christ” and saved; there is no middle ground

The issue each of us must face is, which will we be identified with, Adam or Christ?

Living according to our old nature of sin and death inherited from Adam.

Or the gift of the new nature of grace and life given to us in Christ Jesus

Verse 12 begins,

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned— To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone’s account where 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 is a pattern of the one to come. 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! Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. 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! Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. 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. The law was brought in 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.” (Romans 5:12–21)

For years Theodore Darymple worked as a doctor among prisoners and in hospitals in England. One prisoner told Dr Darymple that he had become depressed after his trouble came on him. His trouble, it turned out, was breaking and entering churches, stealing whatever valuables he could find, then burning them down to destroy the evidence.

The Dr wondered whether this trouble had come about because the prisoner had been forced in his childhood to attend too many church services by a hypocritical family. He found out that that wasn’t the case at all but was because, as this man put it, churches were so poorly secured, easy to break into, and often contained valuable objects made of silver. The man insisted, that he wasn’t responsible for what

he did, he was the victim. The man said the churches were to blame for his behavior because they had such poor security which only reinforced his compulsion to steal.

In 1980, a Boston court acquitted Michael Tindall of flying illegal drugs into the country. Tyndall's attorneys argued that he was a victim of "action addict syndrome," an emotional disorder that makes a person crave dangerous, thrilling situations. Tindall wasn't a drug dealer; he was merely a thrill seeker.

An Oregon man who tried to kill his ex-wife was acquitted on the grounds that he suffered from "depression-suicide syndrome," whose victims deliberately commit poorly planned crimes with the unconscious goal of being caught or killed. He didn't really want to shoot his wife; he wanted the police to shoot him.

And then there was Dan White, who murdered San Francisco mayor George Moscone in 1978. In trial he was acquitted of murder and convicted to a lesser charge when his attorneys argued that he had twinkie syndrome. He wasn't responsible. He killed the mayor because of the emotional distress caused by his junk food binges.

For large segments of the population, which seems to be getting larger every year, sin is becoming a non-issue.

It's either something that other people are guilty of or it is something that is beyond our control, and therefore something we are not responsible for

We are all victims of something – the way we were raised or where we were raised, our socio-economic situation, our education, or something else entirely

In such an environment, the entire concept of sin becomes meaningless because to admit that I am a sinner is to say that I am responsible for my life and actions

And increasingly people don't want to be responsible for anything

Its preferable for many to see themselves as victims not sinners.

If victims, then not responsible.

And if not responsible, then not guilty before God.

And if not guilty, then we don't need a savior and can continue to live as we please

But as Paul clearly states throughout Romans, we are all responsible for our lives, our actions, and our sin.

Back in chapter 3 Paul had said, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and therefore all are guilty before God

This passage is considered to be among the most difficult in the book of Romans, which is saying a lot given the nature and content of the book.

what makes it especially difficult for us, is that Paul says we are not just guilty our own sin, but because we are identified with him as our forefather, we also bear the guilt and face the consequences for Adam's.

Look how often he repeats himself to make this point

- in verse 12, ***sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned***

- *in verse 15 he states, many died by the trespass of the one man*
- *and again in verse 16, the judgement followed one sin and brought condemnation*
- *verse 17 says, through the trespass of one man death reigns*
- *in verse 18, one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people*
- *and again, in verse 19 through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners”*

it's the basis for the doctrine of original sin, as our forefathers, when Adam and Eve sinned, we all fell right along with them
as the first man, our forefather, he represented all of us

John Stott put it like this, all died because all sinned in and through Adam, who is the representative or federal head of the human race.

While there are a number of words in both the Greek and Hebrew that are translated sin. Here Paul uses the one which means to miss a target or take the wrong path

When he sinned, Adam set off down the wrong path and we've all been following him ever since.

as his descendants we inherit his fallen nature and face the consequences of his sin, which is death and separation from God

We are so used to thinking of ourselves; my rights, my privileges, my desires, my happiness, and my needs that we may not realize the impact our lives have on others
to use the words of Judges 17:6, everyone does as they see fit in their own eyes

how contrary this is to the life and example of our Lord who set aside his own needs and desires for us and then calls us to come and follow him and his example, he gave his life for us

Philippians 2:3-11, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Jesus commands to love our neighbors as ourselves, and in his great description of love in 1 Cor 13, Paul says love is not self-seeking.

If everyone is looking out for themselves, love takes a back seat

It is an attitude captured in Cain's words to the Lord when confronted for killing his brother.

He first tried to deny responsibility by saying, Am I my brother's keeper?

And when that didn't work, he tried to play the victim stating that his punishment was unfair and more than he could bear.

It can be so much easier to play the victim than take responsibility.
But we are responsible

In an article for Christianity Today Magazine, Haddon Robinson wrote:

Have those, “not responsible for...” signs ever vexed you? Hang up your coat at a restaurant and there is a sign warning that the management is not responsible for your garment. Ever read the small print on your airline ticket? The airline takes no responsibility for any delays or missed connections, and if your baggage is lost, they only have to pay an amount agreed upon at a convention they held in Warsaw back in 1955. Park your car in some high-priced lot, and a sign will tell you no one is responsible for any items stolen from your vehicle. It seems no one takes responsibility for anything or anyone anymore.

Genesis doesn't actually say it, but I suspect there was a Not responsible for...sign on one of the trees in Eden. Eve was the first victim. She could not be responsible for eating the fruit. The serpent tricked me, she shrugged. Adam was the second victim. The woman you gave me offered me the forbidden fruit, he explained to God and that's why I ate it.

Adam and Eve's descendants, especially those in the United States—have refined victimization to a fine art and article of faith. Doesn't the Devil made me do it have the ring of modern evangelicalism? We do not use victimization merely to get let off; we use it to cash in. If we trip on our shoelaces and fall flat on our face in the middle of the sidewalk, we sue everybody from the public works department to the shoelace factory. If you want to get rich, invest in victimization. It is America's fastest growing industry. Millions make a fat paycheck by identifying victims, representing victims, interviewing victims, treating victims, preaching to victims, and of course, being victims. Not only does it confer absolution for our stupidity and sinfulness, but it allows us to sue for treble damages

And the end result of this often is, instead of looking for a savior, we seek for a scapegoat. I'm not responsible, someone else is!

Yet in our passage in Romans 5, Paul says we are responsible and therefore guilty right alongside of Adam
our actions carry consequences, not just for us, but also for others and for those who may come after us

some, like John Stott and Martin Lloyd Jones use the word solidarity to describe this

It's the understanding that the bible was written to people who understood that our identity and self-understanding come not merely as a collection individuals, but primarily as part of a group, from our family, our community, the web of relationships which define our lives and provide meaning.

What you and I do carries consequences far beyond ourselves

There are numerous examples in scripture

Examples like found in Exodus 7. When Israel entered the promised land and attacked Jericho, the Lord instructed them to devote everything to the Lord and not keep any of it for themselves or their own personal use.

But one man, Achan, saw some gold and silver and decided he wanted it for himself so he hid it. As a result of this one man's disobedience, when they moved on and attacked the smaller and less well defended city of Ai, they were defeated

The entire nation faced the consequences of one man's sin

Hebrews 7 says that even though he wasn't born yet, Levi had given a tithe to the priest Melchizedek through his forefather Abraham.

And then the greatest example of all is found at the cross

We may not have been there but it was our sin that led him there

Like the old spiritual put it, "Twas I that shed the sacred blood; I nailed him to the tree. I crucified the Christ of God, I joined the mockery."

There is another side to this idea of solidarity which extends beyond our responsibility for sin

It carries over to our hope for salvation as well.

For just as sin and death entered the world through the actions of one man, so too justification and salvation come as the result of the work of one man, Jesus Christ

- Thus Paul could say in verse 15, while many died by the trespass of 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.
- :17 says that if death reigned because of the sin of one man, how much more will grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ
- in :18 just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people so also one righteous act of Jesus results in life for people
- and :19 says just as we all became sinners because of one man, so through the obedience of the one man Jesus, many will be made righteous

in drawing the contrast Warren Wiersbe wrote,

The first Adam was made of earth, but the last Adam, Jesus, came from heaven. The first Adam was the king of the old creation, while the last Adam is King and priest over the new creation. The first Adam was tested in a perfect garden and disobeyed God, while the last Adam was tested in a terrible wilderness and obeyed God; and in the Garden of Gethsemane, He surrendered His will to God. The disobedience of the first Adam brought sin, condemnation, and death upon the human race, but the obedience of the last Adam brought righteousness, salvation, and life to all who believe. Through the first Adam, death and sin reign in this world, but through the last Adam, grace reigns and believers can reign in life.

Gen. 5:1-2 says what follows in the OT is a book of the generations or genealogy of Adam and it ends in Mal. 4:6 with a curse.

In the NT, Matthew 1:1 begins with the genealogy of Jesus Christ and it ends in Revelation 22:3 with the promise that there will no longer be any curse. The paradise of Genesis that Adam lost is restored in revelation through the cross of Christ.

And now we need to choose which we will follow and be in solidarity with

As Martin Lloyd Jones said, The whole story of the human race can be summed up in terms of what has happened because of Adam, and what has happened and will yet happen because of Christ

Will we remain in Adam or be in Christ.

A small boy was walking down a dirt road after church one Sunday afternoon when he came to a crossroads and met a little girl coming from another direction. Hello, said the boy. Hi replied the girl.

Where are you going asked the boy.

I've been to church this morning and I'm on my way home, answered the girl

Me too, replied the boy. What church do you go to?

The protestant church back down the road, replied the little girl. What about you?

Mine's the Catholic church at the top of the hill said the boy.

They discovered that they both go home the same way so they walked along together. When they came to a low spot in the road, the spring rains had flooded the road and there was no way they could get across to the other side without getting wet.

If I get my new Sunday dress wet my mom's going to skin me alive, said the girl.

My mom'll tan my hide too if I get my new Sunday suit wet, replied the boy.

Tell you what I think, said the little girl. I'm going to pull off all my clothes and hold them over my head and wade across.

That's a good idea, replied the boy. I'm going to do the same thing with my suit.

So they both undressed and waded across to the other side without getting their clothes wet. They were standing there in the sun waiting to dry before putting their clothes back on when the little boy finally looked at the girl and remarked, You know, I never had any idea how much difference there is between Protestants and Catholics

We so often divide people into groups to highlight our differences based on color or sex or politics or denomination or where they're from or how much they're worth.

But these all misunderstand what truly matters

Before God, the only difference that matters is will we remain in Adam or be in Christ.

In verse 15-16 he says it is a choice between the trespass and the free gift

In verse 17 it's a choice between death and life

In verse 18 it's a choice between condemnation and justification

In verse 19 the choice is between disobedience and obedience

Verse 20 says it is a choice between law and grace

If, as Wiersbe said, when God looks upon the human race, He sees but two men—Adam and Christ. And every one of us is either “in Adam” and lost, or “in Christ” and saved, there is no middle ground.

Then we need to decide which we will be.

The choice is up to you