

MESSAGE FOR SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 1998 FROM ROMANS
5:12ff.

This morning we come to the fifth chapter of Romans beginning with verse 12. We have been looking at the blessings of justification--those benefits which accompany being made right with God through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ. The text this morning begins with the word "Therefore" so we know this text is related to what has preceded it. Just HOW this text relates to what precedes it is disputed. One thing we do know is that in chapters three, four and the first half of chapter five, Paul has put the teaching of justification by faith under a microscope. He has presented in detail how God, through Christ has made rebellious sinners into righteous saints and what that means to them. He has been very detailed and methodical in his arguments. As we begin the second half of chapter five, Paul radically changes his approach. He moves from the microscope, which he has been using to look at justification in great detail, to the telescope with which he looks at justification from a great distance. Beginning in verse 12, he paints with very broad strokes, looking at the BIG picture of justification by faith.

He essentially narrows the whole salvation process down to its two main players. He has cleared the stage of all the backdrops and two actors stand alone, Adam and Jesus Christ. To put it broadly, Paul is saying in a sense, *"here's the problem and the one who got us into this mess, Adam. And here's the solution, the only One who can rescue people from this horrible dilemma, Jesus Christ."* He spends verses 12-21 contrasting Adam, and his role in introducing sin and its horrific consequences with, Christ and his role in solving life's most unsolvable problems, sin and death. This

morning, we will be looking at verses 12-14 which means we won't even get to the solution, we will focus only on the problem. Let's read 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-- [now, we expect Paul here to complete this “just as sin entered..., so this” but he doesn't finish the thought, he takes off on a bit of a tangent saying in verse 13,] 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.”

The basic truth of this text is simply: **Adam's sin polluted humanity by bringing sin and death into it.** These verses are essentially all about sin and its important for believers to know as much about sin as we can for a number of reasons. First, the more we know about sin, **the more we will take it seriously** and take the steps necessary to put it to death within us. One reason why people fall into heinous, relationship-wrecking sin is because they have a superficial understanding of sin. That attitude allows them to not be alarmed by the very real power and awesome destructive force which sin carries. Another reason to know more about sin is the more we know about it, **the more we can , by the Holy Spirit, easily recognize it** in ourselves. And the first step to dealing with sin is to recognize it early on and nip it in the bud. Finally, the more we know about sin and its power, the more grateful we are to God for sending Jesus to definitively deal with sin. If we see sin as a BIG problem, we will have a BIG Savior. If we have a superficial appreciation for the power of sin, we will have a superficial appreciation of our Lord in defeating sin's power at the cross.

This text communicates three important broad truths about sin--the *essence* of sin, the *introduction and extent* of sin and the *effect* or consequence of sin. Or, to put it in the form of three questions: what is sin, how did WE get it and what does it cause? The first question the text addresses implicitly is: ***what is the essence of sin?*** The Bible uses numerous words for sin, but when you boil all the nuances of sin down to their common denominator, what is it? Since sin has its human origin with Adam, we can find the essence or root of sin by looking at the first instance of sin.

Adam and Eve sinned when they willingly chose to believe what the serpent told them in direct contradiction to what God said to them. God had told them **what was true**--they would die if they ate from the tree. They chose to believe that the truth was what Satan told them--“you will not die.” God told them **what was right**. God had told them it was morally right not to eat from the tree. They chose to believe what Satan told them, that it was morally right TO eat from the tree. Finally, God had told them **who they were**. They understood from God that they were creatures of God, dependent upon Him and ruling the earth with Him and under Him. They chose to believe what Satan told them about who they were--that they would be “like God.” Those were the three elements of their sin and the link between each element is the fact that they willingly rebelled against what God had told them. The essence of sin is personal rebellion against God.

Some think of sin as primarily breaking God’s law and it certainly is sin to break God’s law, but Paul in verse 13 says, “for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin was not taken into account when there is no law.” Sin was in the world before Moses brought the law of God to the people on Sinai. This tells us that sin is more than breaking the law because

there was sin before there was law. ***Sin is personal rebellion against God.*** It is a refusal to recognize God for who He is and a refusal to live your life for HIS glory instead of our own. That is what Adam and Eve did in the Fall. When the law came along with Moses, it simply labeled and energized sin. Romans 7:7-8 says, “...I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.” But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire..”

Think about it this way: Sin is rebellion against God. The law is an expression of God’s character. If that’s true, then what will be the reaction of a person in rebellion against God, to an explicit expression of God’s character? That explicit expression of God will energize--intensify His rebellion because sin is rebellion against God. The more of God’s character the sinner knows in specificity, the more sin they will generate in response to that because of their rebellion against God. When God brought the law, an expression of His character to a group of people who were by nature rebelling against him, it was like throwing gasoline on a fire.

The essence of sin is not legal--the law is legal by definition. The essence of sin is relational, its personal and that relational element is present with or without the law. Adam brought rebellion against God and His kingdom into the world. Satan, who had earlier rebelled against God in heaven brought his show to earth. His rebellion against God didn’t effect the earth because he came as an alien--he wasn’t native to this place--this was his place of exile when he was thrown out of his home, heaven. But sin sure did effect the earth, when one of its natives, Adam indulged in it. Then it brought destruction to everything else that was native--the entire created

order of this place. The essence of sin is rebellion against God. Someone has called it cosmic treason--that's right.

There are many applications to this, but a main one is we need to respond to our sin as a personal matter, not a legal matter with God. This distinction about sin being personal and not legal is crucial to a healthy relationship with God. If sin is simply breaking a rule or commandment, then the proper response to sin is simply to stop breaking the rules and responding to the law-Giver on a purely legal plain. If you get a ticket for speeding, you get a bit agitated because you got caught or get mad at yourself for your carelessness, but you hopefully resolve not to do that anymore--at least not in the place you got the ticket. But its a legal issue. You don't write a formal letter of apology to the city council who set the city speed limits. You dispense with it impersonally and move on.

But sin is not essentially legal--it is a personal offense against God. When we sin, we are grieving the very heart of God. He sees it as personal rebellion from a person he has sent His Son to save. When we sin, we dare not deal with it on a legal plain but this is precisely what many believers do. They sin and they confess it with so little thought. Its like checking off an item on a "to do list" for them--*"I took care of that one."* Is that the way you respond to another human being when you have wronged them? "Yes, *remember yesterday when I insulted you and your family, well I understand that wrong and I wanted to promptly dispense a confession. Please consider this statement as a fulfillment of my obligation to you.*" How blessed are you going to be by that? We would never insult another person like that--turning a what should be a personal apology insult into a legal obligation.

Yet this is what we do every time we sin before God and in a matter of fact way, check off our confession. *"Yes, Lord that's sin-I confess that."*

I have met my legal obligation to you, Lord. At the very least, that betrays a horribly shallow relationship with God. People quote 1 John 1:9 to support this legal confession view of relating to sin. “If we CONFESS our sin”-- “*that means we have to name our sin to God.*” That much is true, but that text is not a comprehensive biblical treatment of how we are relate to God when we sin. How about James 4:9 which says, “Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom?” That brings out the fact that our sin is personal against God and should grieve us.

We need to see our sin as breaking God’s heart--grieving Him. We need to ask Him to reveal this to us in our hearts. If we can experience sin for what it is and deal with it accordingly, that will help us in our battle against sin. If we see sin as a personal offense against a holy and loving God, we will by God’s grace, take more measures to keep ourselves from sin. The essence of sin is personal rebellion against God.

The second question this text answers about sin is: ***how did we become sinners?*** We know that everyone born into this world is a sinner from day one. David says in Psalm 51:5, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” Ephesians 2:3 says, “...Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.” Any parent knows that although they have to do a whole lot of teaching kids how to be good, they don’t have to give their children one lesson on how to sin. They do it naturally--no coaching required. In fact, they are brilliant at sinning--geniuses, without one lesson. If our children aren’t good at anything else, they are extremely skilled at rebellion.

The doctrine which answers this question of how we became sinners is commonly known as the **doctrine of original sin** and this doctrine comes mostly from Romans 5:12. Paul says, “...sin entered the world through one

man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sin.” We all understand that Adam introduced sin into this world.

Actually, Eve sinned first, but it was Adam who transmitted the sin to the rest of the world because of his headship over humanity. We saw this some time ago when we discussed men and women from a biblical perspective.

The question is: what does Paul mean when he says “because all sinned?” He clearly makes the case that because Adam sinned, all sinned (past tense) and that brings this sin to all of us

We have it in the womb--it is part and parcel of being a human being. The only person who has never had this original sin is Jesus Christ and that is because His fatherhood is not traced back to Adam, but to God. Anyone who traces their lineage back to Adam is born in Adam’s sin. We see this idea reinforced in verse 19, “...through the disobedience of the one man, the many were made sinners.”

The question is, how does the fact that Adam sinned make everyone else sinners? There are two orthodox responses to that question. The first one says the reason why all are sinners because of Adam is because all of us **were biologically present in Adam.** We were all in him in germinal or seminal form in our ancestry. Because that is true, we all share in his sin. Advocates of this view draw support from texts like Hebrews 7:10 which says, Levi was “in the loins” of Abraham. That is to say, Levi, who was born long after Abraham was in some way present genetically within Abraham. This view explains this transmission of the sin of Adam to the rest of us that way. This is the view of Augustine and others

Another view and one which fits this text better is that Adam, as the first human being **represented** all of us in his headship over humanity. Because he was the head of humanity, whatever he did as our head is

transferred to those who are under his headship. This view sounds unfair to people, but it's not. If it is unfair for Adam to act as the head of humanity and as their representative have *his sin* be transferred to all those under them, then it is equally unfair for Christ, as the head of the church to have *his righteousness* transferred to all those under His headship. In other words, if it's wrong for Adam's sin to curse anyone else but himself, then it is just as unfair for the atoning death of Christ to bless anyone outside of himself which is ridiculous because Christ didn't have any sin of his own to atone for. Adam was the representative of the human family and his sin brought death to that family. Jesus Christ was the representative of the family of God and his atonement brought life to that family.

Because Adam's sin is transferred to the rest of us, we can discover how that sin affects us. Remember, in the sin of Adam, he rebelled against God in the areas of what is true, what is right and who he was. All our sin can be traced back to rebellion against God in one of those three areas. When we choose to **reject the truth** and believe a lie from the devil or our flesh, we bring all sorts of fear into our lives. We believe the lie that God won't take care of us, so we start hoarding wealth to make sure we are secure in our old age. We believe the lie that no one loves us so we live in the prison of insecurity and paranoia. We believe the lie we, as believers are not pleasing to God and then we spend our lives trying to make ourselves into someone God could love. The lies lead to fear and the fear leads to a host of other sins.

We rebel against God about **what is right** and we fornicate or commit adultery because there is nothing wrong with it at the moment. When we violate a moral norm, we are simply rebelling against God about what is right or wrong. We rebel against God over the question of "**who am I?**"

And the answer we give is invariably the same one the serpent fed to Adam and Eve, “I am God or just like God.” Earlier this week, someone gave me a clipping highlighting Ted Turner’s statement where he said, “*the ten commandments are outdated*” and need to be replaced. He has taken the liberty of submitting his own Ted’s commandments--ten much more reasonable, contemporary life rules. This sounds outrageous to us, but he it is nothing more than the sin of Adam--he is acting as if he is God. He’s a sinner, nothing more and nothing less. We were all born in sin because when Adam represented us, he sold us out and we are forced to submit to his cursed, sin stained headship. The good news, we’ll see next week is--those who are believers have a new Head and a new life.

The third question this text answers is: ***what are the consequences of sin?***

The answer is “**death**.” Sin brings death. Paul says in verse 12, “...sin entered the world through one man, and **death** through sin, and in this way **death** came to all men...” In verse 14 he says, “...death reigned” because of the sin of Adam. With only a couple of notable exceptions, no one escaped the consequence of sin. Whenever we go to a funeral, what we are doing in a purely theological sense is taking official notice of the awesome, lethal power of sin. At every death, sin has claimed another victim. On death certificates, the cause of death the Coroner records range from trauma, to cancer to heart disease. But on God’s spiritual death certificate, the cause of death is always the same, sin.

R.C. Sproul is right when he says, “*We are all sitting on death row awaiting execution. The greatest mass killer of all time was not Adolph Hitler or Joseph Stalin. The greatest mass killer of all is Mother Nature.*”

Everyone falls victim to her. Mother Nature does not operate independently from God. She is merely the avenger of a holy God [against sin].