

Rebuilding the Foundations - Romans
Part 10
“The Two Streams of History: Adam And Christ”
Romans 5:12-21
Pastor Charles Price

Now I'm going to read from Romans 5:12-21. I want to say in advance, this is a very dense section of scripture, and as we read it, it won't suddenly make absolute sense. Probably to most of us — if you're like me — that we're going to pull out what I believe to be the main thrust of this passage and seek to understand it and apply it in our own lives and circumstances.

But Romans 5:12-21, Paul writes,

"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 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 was 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? Again, the gift of God is not like the results of the 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 a 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. 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 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."

I don't know if you ever heard about the butterfly effect, but the butterfly effect is a theory that says that a butterfly flapping its wings, let's say in Beijing in China, a week later may cause a forced twelve hurricane in New York. This was first come about through a man called Edward Lorenz in the early 1960s. He was a mathematician and a meteorologist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and he was simulating weather patterns on a computer program that he devised. And one day he was rerunning a pattern that he had followed through on an earlier occasion, but in typing the data into the program, he put it in one detail which had six decimal points, but inserted them in the first three, thinking that the final three points — which are in thousands of a unit — would not be significant.

So, he left those out and put the data into his program, began to run the program, and the same sort of pattern began to develop. But after a while, it began to change and diversify. And so, at the end, there was a totally different weather pattern to the original one.

And as a result of that, he came up with what he called the butterfly factor. The butterfly effect. That is a tiny little event can have huge repercussions meteorologically. That's why meteorologists have less difficulty predicting the weather so accurately because they failed to take into account the butterflies in China or a pigeon down in Brazil, flapping its wings can cause a tornado in Texas a week later. Of course, a lot of other factors. But as in the final straw that breaks the camel's back, there's that little bit of movement that is a final straw that determines something that comes to consequence.

Well, I want to talk to you this morning about a spiritual butterfly effect that Paul talks about here in the second part of Romans 5. He talks about some enormous consequences that have spread throughout history over one act of disobedience on the one hand, and what he calls one act of obedience on the other hand. And the history of the world, the history of the human race, wherever you look and whenever in history you look, shows an out working of the one act of disobedience and also the one act of obedience.

Now this passage we read together just now is not the easiest passage to read and to immediately comprehend everything that is in it. But let me try and reduce it — if I may — to a sentence that I think is the main thrust of what Paul is writing here.

And the sentence will be this, “by the disobedience of one man — Adam — all people became sinners, which results in death, but by the obedience of the one-man Christ all people may become righteous, which results in life.”

The Two Streams of History

Now, I think that's the summary of what Paul is writing in these verses, and I want to talk to you this morning about this under the title, the two streams of history. The stream, which flows from Adam and the stream, which flows from Christ. Now I need to ask you to think a little bit with me this morning because there are some issues here that we need to think about, and which aren't necessarily easy to grasp hold of.

1. The Stream of Adam

But let us talk, first of all, about the stream from Adam. Romans 5:12 says,

"Therefore, just that sin entered the world through one man and death through sin. And in this way, death came to all men because all men sin."

Now, Paul says that every human being has inherited traits, negative traits. He talks about sin and death that go right back to Adam. Now, some of you may be saying to yourself this morning, "Surely you don't believe in the myth of Adam as a literal historical person, do you?"

My answer is no, I don't actually believe in the myth of Adam, and I'll tell you why. Adam is not myth. Actually, so much of the New Testament is dependent on the historicity of Adam, and I know there's lots of things that are ambiguous that surround the beginnings, I recognize that. But in the New Testament theologically, much of what Paul has to teach us is dependent on a historical Adam, not least in this passage, also in first Corinthians 15, once again, Paul talks

about Adam and certain things which emanate from Adam. Jesus alluded to Adam and Eve. He never used the names, but for instance, in Matthew, 19, he says at the beginning the creator made them male and female. He's talking there about marriage, and he says he created the male and female.

Now I make it a basic rule in controversial issues — whether they are historical or ethical — the basic rule is this, never disagree with Jesus. That's a wise way to move forward. Don't say, “Well, he didn't know as much as we know.” He knew an awful lot more than we know. And Adam, as you may know, is not just actually a singular name of one man in the Old Testament. It is also the name given to Adam and Eve together, collectively.

In Genesis 5:2 it says he created them male and female and blessed them, and when they were created, he called them Adam. Now, if you have an NIV, as I do, it says, ‘called them man,’ puts a note - look in the margin and the margin, says the original, says ‘Adam’. Well, why don't they include that? Because that's really what it does say, it says Adam. And so, Adam is not just the name of the male of the two Adam and Eve, it's also the name given to Adam and Eve together corporately. That's why Adam, as a male, is not being held responsible for sin here on his own, because you and I know that Eve actually led him into it.

And in 1 Timothy, Paul says sin came through the woman, but actually, Adam here encompasses Adam and Eve. They stand guilty together for this whoever fault it was, they stand guilty together for this. But what happened to Adam, what happened to Adam and Eve? Because

it is crucial here to what Paul is teaching because it says ‘sin entered the world through one man and death through sin. In this way, death came to all men, all people.’

But what actually happened? Well, you have to go back to Genesis 2:15-17. Let me just tell you very quickly, you can read it later when God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He said, you're free to do whatever you like, except one thing. Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and I am quoting this "for when you eat of it, you will surely die." (Genesis 2:17) The King James version says, “The day you eat of it, you will die.” Well, you remember they ate of it, of course they did. And what happened, did they die, did they fall over dead? Did God find a couple of corpses lying at the foot of the tree? Well, no, they live for many more years, Adam lived for many years, he fathered a family. So, what does it mean when he said the ‘day you eat of it, you will die?’ Well, clearly it didn't apply to physical death. He didn't die physically that day. But what he did do, was die spiritually.

What does that mean? Well, in the language of Paul again in Ephesians 4:18, he describes spiritual death as being ‘separated from the life of God.’ That is, human beings were created to function properly only when they are indwelt by the life of God, by the Spirit of God. So, the day Adam died in the Garden of Eden, it was spiritual death in which he became separated from the life of God. And as a result, as Romans 5:13,17 tells us, there was ushered in the reign of death – Romans 5:13, “death reigned from the time of Adam” – Romans 5:17 “by the trespasser of the one man, death reigned through that one man.”

This is the spiritual butterfly effect –death reigned. We inherit from Adam, not spiritual life — we could not inherit what he ceased to possess — we have inherited a state of spiritual death. And death reigns in the sense that we are born physically functioning and well, but spiritually dead. That's why in Ephesians 2:1,3, Paul wrote there to the Ephesians he said, “as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins” – “like the rest, we were by nature, objects of wrath.” He says you were dead, and it was by nature that you were in this condition.

If I can try and clarify this and I don't want to oversimplify, but the human constitution is made up of three parts: we have a body, we have a soul and we have a spirit. Now I know that some Christians and I recognize their position on this who say we are bipartite, not tripartite, that is, we are made up of body and soul. The spirit and soul are sort of a virtually interchangeable term. We have the tangible and the intangible, but I think that we must conclude for a number of reasons that the spirit and soul are separate from each other.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 speaks of your ‘whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ It distinguishes between the three, we are body, soul and spirit.

Let me just clarify these three. The body, of course, is the part that you're most aware of. It's the most obvious part about us, is what you saw this morning when you looked into the mirror for good or ill and you probably washed it and you fed it and you dressed it and you shaved it, some of you and you painted it, some of you. And you put it in your car or put it on the subway and you rode it to church, and you're sitting here right now, and later in the day, you'll feed it a few more times and you eventually put it to bed, and you know you've got a body. It's the most

obvious thing about us. It's different in shape and size, and that's how we recognize each other. In addition to our body, we also have a soul. The soul is the life it inhabits the body. Now we're all aware we have a soul, every one of us, because we make it a priority every day that we won't do anything today, which will cause my body and myself to separate from each other. Because if the body in the soul separate, what happens to the body is our relatives put it in a box and bury it — and we don't want that to happen — so we make sure our body and soul stay together because the soul is the personality that dwells in the body, comprising of mind, emotion and will, the ingredients of personality. But in addition to our body and soul, we have a spirit.

Now this is the part that makes us uniquely human as opposed to simply an intelligent animal. And I'll explain, there are three kinds of life all together: there's plant life, animal life and human life. Plant life consists of body, that's all.

So, if you have a tree in your garden, you don't get up in the morning and open your window and say to the tree, “Good morning, tree, did you have a good night? Would you like to hear the news this morning? I'll put the radio on the windowsill.” I mean, you don't do that. It's alive, but it's just physical life. I know some people talk to their trees and play music to their trees. I understand Prince Charles does, but normal people don't, because it's just physical life.

Animals have a body and a soul, in fact, the Hebrew word in the Old Testament for soul is a word for animal life. So, you can speak to a dog and a dog has a measure of understanding. You say ‘sit’ and the dog says ‘that means put my rear on the floor,’ and it does. ‘Beg’, holds his paws up, hopes he gets fed. Their minds have emotions, we have a couple of cats, they have

emotions because one of our cats is very young: met our neighbour's dog this week, went through an incredibly emotional experience. It kind of trembled inside. So, animals have a soul if we define soul — the Hebrew word for soul — which is for animal life.

But what makes us different is we have a capacity animals don't have, we ask questions animals never ask. We say things like this, 'Where did I come from?' We say, 'where am I going?' We look up in the sky on a clear night and we say, 'I wonder what's up there?' We ask ourselves the question, 'What is the meaning of life now?' Animals never do that. You don't find dogs trying to trace where they came from. Who's my granny? Let me go and find out who she is and if they found her, they're probably fight her anyway. And you don't find cows in the field looking up into the sky on a starry night saying, 'I wonder what's up there? Do you think there's any milk on Mars?' You don't find cats committing suicide because they lost the meaning to life. You know, the ginger tommy down the road went off for the tabby, and so this poor little black and white cat says, 'I've lost my purpose in living', so he climbs a tree and leaps off splat, you know?

Human beings do that, but animals don't, why not? Because this is part of a spiritual capacity, the spirit capacity is the capacity whereby we're designed to reach outside of ourselves and know and experience and enjoy God. Now, the consequence of being spiritually dead is that although we retain spiritual capacity, we still ask the same questions; Where did I come from? Where am I going? What's up there? What's the meaning? We don't have the answers. We are left confused and devoid of answer. And this is what theologians call 'The Fall'. It's the explanation for the world we find ourselves in.

It's what theologians mean when they talk about total depravity. Total depravity does not mean that we're all as bad as we could be because — that isn't so thankfully — but it means that none of us are as good as we should be because we're not. We're depraved. Now, there's a difference between Adam and us in this sense. Adam Sin preceded death. As a result of his act of disobedience, he died, but for us, it's our state of spiritual death, which precedes and makes inevitable our sin. You see, he says in Romans 5:13 that "sin is not taken into account where there is no law." So, we say, what about the time when there are no commands? How can you send it? There's no law to break. Nevertheless, says Paul, in Romans 5:14, "deaths range from the time of to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command as Adam did." When there was no command to understand and to obey we were already dead. Death reigned inevitably, he says, that we sin.

And this state of death is what Paul describes in Romans 6:23 as the wages of sin. Now notice that verse, it says Romans 6:23 "the wages of sin is death." It's a present tense statement. We are already dead. You see, you will never one day reap the wages of sin or receive the wages of sin. We have already received the wages of sin, which were paid in the Garden of Eden, the result of which you and I are born already dead.

That's why in first Corinthians 15:22, Paul says, "in Adam all die." That's why the Bible never says anybody who ever died for their sin. What it does say is we can die in our sin, that is, we can stay in a state of separation from God. We can die in our sin, or the alternative is we can come alive. That's the only alternative to being dead, coming alive. And that's the whole thrust of the gospel — I've come so you might have life, says Jesus, as we're seeing just a moment.

Now, as a result of this, there are two reigning principles, that's Paul's words. Romans 5:17, he says "by the trespass of the one-man death reigned,": death reigns. That is, it governs, it rules. Spiritual death, in the first instance, as a result of that, Romans 8 tells us the whole creation fell into a state of decay. And so physical death is a consequence that comes out of that and ultimately eternal death. The second death derives from that. Death reigns left its own course that is the consequence.

And the other thing which reigns, in Romans 5:21, Paul speaks of as "sin reigned in death." Death reigns and sin reigns, that's why we are so messed up. That's why all of us in this building this morning are dysfunctional. Because sin reigns and we are corrupted because of that. It gets into our minds, so we find ourselves thinking thoughts we shouldn't think. It gets into our emotions, so we find ourselves loving things we shouldn't love and lusting after things we shouldn't be lusting after. It gets into our will, so we find ourselves doing things we shouldn't do, but we do them and we enjoy doing them anyway, because sin reigns. It's a constant pull and battle and it's very important we understand this if we are to understand the world.

If we are to understand sociology, that's how society works, we must understand 'The Fall'. If we're going to understand psychology, how the individual functions, we must understand 'The Fall.' If we're going to understand theology, that is how we relate to God and God relates to us, we must understand 'The Fall.' The fact that as a result, we are born dead. But this isn't just some quirk of the Bible or some quirk of theology.

I read a while ago a book by a man called Richard Dawkins that quoted him before he's a popular writer, he's an atheist, a professor at Oxford University in England. He's written several bestselling books, all of which seek — because he claims this — to undermine the myth of God and a supreme being and a creator. But the first book he wrote is called *The Selfish Gene*. And I want to quote to you from it. He says, “the primary human drive is not the preservation of the species, but the preservation of self. We are driven by self-interest. Even altruistic behaviour, that is doing good things for people, may have its roots in self-interest.”

I find that interesting, because Richard Dawkins there is saying that behind every human being lies this principal of sin, he calls it selfishness. Which is one of the first symptoms of our sin. So, the stream from Adam is by one man's act of disobedience that rears two things, there reigns death we were born spiritually dead and there reigns sin as a consequence.

2. The Stream from Christ

Now, let's look at the other stream he talks about the stream that comes from Christ. And it is both the complete opposite of the stream from Adam and rectifies the stream from Adam. Let me read you Romans 5:19, he says,

“Just as through the disobedience of the one man, the many were made sinners. So, through the obedience of the one man, the many will be made righteous.”

If Adam's disobedience leads to death and sin, Christ's obedience leads to life and righteousness, the two things he talks about there. Let me read you Romans 5:18 the earlier verse, he 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."

Now, we've talked in previous weeks about justification, because that is a major theme of the early chapters of the Book of Romans. Being justified — so we're no longer guilty, we're cleansed — as wonderful as that is, is not the end purpose that God had in mind. The end purpose was that having been justified, having been declared right with God having been forgiven about sin, it might bring life — is the word he uses there — justification that brings life. You see, getting rid of our sin is wonderful, but it's a means to an end. It's clearing the decks, it's getting rid of the junk, so to speak, and having cleaned out the mess of our sin, we might then be equipped to live in the power of a new life.

As the stream from Adam sin led to death, the stream from Christ being made righteous, being justified is the means to life the complete opposite. That the life Adam lost is restored and into our experience. Now I want to stress this because sometimes we are so excited about being forgiven that we fail to grasp that is only the way into the real purpose, which is that we might enjoy life, the life of Jesus Christ now implanted within us.

Let me illustrate this, being a Christian is like getting married — so the New Testament tells us, he uses this illustration — it says Christ as the bride groom, the church: Christians are the bride.

Now, when a person marries, there are two things we're also told in the Bible that take place.

One you can say is a negative thing, one is a positive thing. The two things are these, “a man must leave his father and his mother” — that you can say is negative, it's leaving the old arrangement, he's coming out of the authority under which he has operated in his home, he leaves his father and mother and the positive is that he cleaves to his wife. He comes into a new relationship. Now that's what marriage is about, is leaving in order to cleave. Now the Christian life is about being justified, leaving, coming out of our sin in order to come into life, as he puts it, to begin to enjoy new life, to begin to enjoy the power of another life, the life of Christ is cleaving.

Now, a lot of us have been excited about coming out, believing. “I'm no longer guilty. I'm forgiven in my sin.” Wonderful. But we fail to get equally excited and sometimes even to understand the whole point is when we come into this rule of life, the reign of life we're going to talk about where Christ reigns within us is.

You see if you met somebody who's getting married next Saturday, and all they could say was, “I'm really looking forward to leaving home on Saturday.” You probably said to yourself, “They're going to have a shock on Sunday.” But where he's leaving home is necessary, it's a means to an end that isn't marriage. Marriage is not leaving home — that's necessary — marriage is cleaving. You enter someone's 25th wedding anniversary and at the end of the meal that you've all enjoyed together, the husband gets up and says, I want to testify that 25 years ago today I left

home and I've never been back since. You say to yourself, "How strange?" But, you know, that's sometimes how we understand the Christian life. five years ago, ten years ago, I came out of my sin. Wonderful. But that isn't the point. That is a means to the point that is necessary.

But we come into life. That's why here in Romans 5:10 before we started reading in verse 10, he says "if when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son." That's how you become a Christian, reconciled to God to the death of his son. Listen to this, "how much more?" I mean pause a moment; did you know there was more than being reconciled to God by the death of his son? Paul says so. "How much more having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life?" Having been reconciled coming out of my sin out of the old life, that is fantastic. But Paul says there's so much more and that is that now we'll be saved by his life.

There is a hymn you know, we used to sing a lot. We don't sing it much these days, but some of you folks will know it is called, 'Out of My Bondage Sorrow and Night.' Do you know that hymn? It's a great hymn. I love it because it says, "out of my bondage, sorrow and night. Jesus, I come into thy freedom, gladness and light. I come out of my bondage into that freedom. He says, "Out of my sickness into thy health, out of my want into thy wealth, out of my sin into thyself, out of earth's sorrows into thy balm, out of life's storm into thy calm, out of distress into jubilant psalm, out of myself to dwell in thy love, out of despair into raptures above."

I love it. It's out and in, out, in, we are coming out for what purpose? To have come out and that's it? No to come in. Through we enjoy the fullness of the life of Christ that's available to us, and that's why he says much more. Having been reconciled, that's how you become a Christian.

Much more you'll be saved by his life, that's how you 'be' the Christian you become. You become a Christian through his death, you 'be' a Christian every day in dependency on his indwelling life.

And you see, that's exactly what Adam lost. Adam lost life. He died in the Garden of Eden. And the purpose of the gospel is to restore life, and Jesus said, "I am the life." It's his life implanted within us, it's what we call regeneration. Being empowered to live a new life, and so the stream from Adam brings guilt and death, the stream from Christ brings justification and life. And if, as I pointed out, there are two reigning principles that come from Adam, it is also true that there are two reigning principles that come from Christ.

You see, if it says in Romans 5:17, "death reigned from Adam" and in Romans 5:21 "sin reigned from Adam". Well, in Romans 5:17 it says of Christ, "If by the trespass the one man, death reigns through one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ." He talks here, not the reign of death in the reign of sin, but now reigning in life and in Romans 5:21, "Just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness." And he talks there about grace reigning. Grace is God giving to us what we don't deserve all the time. When sin reigns, we simply get what we deserve, all the mess that comes from that.

But when life reigns and grace reigns, we receive what we do not deserve to empower us to live lives that are holy and effective and godly. And every one of us here this morning, it's either being governed by the hereditary traits that come from Adam, the rule of sin, the rule of death or

the hereditary traits that come from Christ. The rule of Grace, resulting in that we rein in life. The reign of life.

The Stream of Christ is a Gift

So, what are the practical consequences of all this? Well, they are that the forces of Adam — the butterfly effect in the Garden of Eden — when Adam sinned, his one act of disobedience, had his consequence on the whole of the human race can be completely reversed. If you're not a Christian this morning you need to come to know Christ for yourself. Where you come and say, “Lord Jesus, I realize my condition, I'm under sin and I'm dead, forgive me, cleanse me and by your Holy Spirit replace death with life. Bring life to me, that I might live in the power of the risen life of Christ,” and you'll discover new appetites, new desires, new power that come from that. But, you know, there are many of us who are Christians, and we fail to grasp that our Christian life is lived on the negative side without Him - I've come out of my sin, come out of my bondage, come out of my guilt and I'm so grateful for that, but I've never really come in to enjoy the richness and the fullness and the enabling and empowering.

And in Romans 6, to which we'll begin to look next week and Romans 7 and Romans 8, these are three crucial chapters which talk about what it means to live in the power of the risen life of Christ. As he imparts to us all that we need to be all that God wants us to be. From Adam the stream is inevitable. We have no choice, but from Christ, the stream is described as a gift in Romans 5:15, “but the gift is not like the trespass,” - a gift has to be received.

With an open outstretched hand, we say Lord Jesus “Thank you.” All that is necessary to restore me to what Adam was begins by the justification of my standing before you because of Christ as my substitute meeting the demands of a holy God. And then by the gift of life to reign in me and rule my life.