

# **A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH ROMANS 5:12-21**

**By Pastor John Carlini, D. Mn.**

**MI. IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO CELEBRATE OUR LIFE IN CHRIST, WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THE STRUGGLE WE HAVE WITH SIN.**

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- A. THE POWER OF AN ACT OF DISOBEDIENCE
- B. THE POWER OF AN ACT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS
- C. THE POWER TO MAKE A CHOICE

## **A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH ROMANS 5:12-21**

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Last week we said that Chapters 5-8 deal with our outlook on life once the salvation issue has been settled. What kind of attitudes should govern our lives once we have received eternal life from Jesus by grace through faith? Last week we said that celebration should be an attitude that characterizes Christians. We are called to celebrate in good times and in bad times we are to celebrate the God who loved us enough to give up His son Jesus while we were yet sinners.

This morning's passage might on the surface look like we are going back to the theme of chapters 1-4, namely salvation by grace through faith, however, I think today's passage is setting the stage for what is to follow in the next couple of chapters. Those chapters will seem to give us conflicting descriptions of what it means to be human. In one sense, as Christians, we are supposed to be dead to and yet victorious over sin, but on the other hand, most of us who take our walk with Christ find ourselves constantly frustrated by our struggle with sin. We seem to be schizophrenic. At one moment, we seem to be flying high, victorious with Christ and then in the very next moment wondering how we could fall for the same old sin again.

Today's passage is going to lay out the explanation of this problem for us. As believers in Christ, we are indeed bipolar. On one hand, since we are human, and we are all children of Adam and Eve we have inherited their bent towards sin. On the other hand, since we have received Jesus in faith, we are new creations we have been born again.

In this world, people know there are two forces at work; since we have all been created in the image of God, we have noble thoughts and feelings that dwell deep within our souls. However, we only need look around at the world we live in, and know that something has gone

very wrong we only need to look at our own lives, and agree with the Bible's assessment that we have all sinned.

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In the past 20 years or so, it has become very fashionable for preachers to avoid the topic of sin. Most of the preaching during this period has focused on self-help topics. But you, who have been with me for the past 12 years, can testify that I have not avoided dealing with the topic of sin. I'll give you an example. I'd like to say this incident took place at that other church that was so tough, however, I have to admit, it happened here at Devon. I was sitting around having coffee with some members when we got on this very topic of sin. One of the people said to me, "you know pastor, I'm so glad you came to Devon Church. I never knew what sin was ... until you came here!" Now I'm not sure how I should take that, but let's see how Paul lays this topic out for us. This is why I think these verses are so important and placed where they are: **IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO CELEBRATE OUR LIFE IN CHRIST, WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THE STRUGGLE WE HAVE WITH SIN.**

If we do not understand that we constantly fight with our old nature, then we will always be confused and discouraged. On the other hand, if we don't have a complete understanding of the struggle, we may just give up the fight and accept the sinful behavior in our life as normal.

Listen! There are a couple of things I want us to leave here with this morning. First, we will struggle with sin all our lives because we are human beings. It is our nature to sin and rebel against God, and our natural bent is towards evil so we will always struggle with this. On the other hand, this is not a legitimate excuse to accept sin as inevitable in our lives. Clearly this passage demonstrates that our new, Christ-like nature is better and more powerful than our old, sinful nature our new nature will win out. In this passage, Paul will describe our old nature as

the one we received from our human ancestor, Adam and he will describe our new nature as the one we received from our spiritual head, Jesus.

I. TWO LEADERS INTRODUCED (Vs. 12-14)  
BECAUSE WE ARE ALL CHILDREN OF ADAM AND EVE, OUR NATURE AND BENT ARE TOWARDS SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCE, DEATH.

In verses 12-14, we are introduced to the two leaders and he will remind us where we come from: BECAUSE WE ARE ALL CHILDREN OF ADAM AND EVE, OUR NATURE AND BENT ARE TOWARDS SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCE, DEATH. We will be introduced to both Adam and Christ. Notice this, in this first section, Adam's name is mentioned and Christ is referred to simply as the One to come. In the next two sections, Jesus is mentioned by name and Adam is referred to as the one man. That means that we are to focus on the consequences of Adam's life in the first section, and the consequences of Jesus' life in the next two.

It's not difficult to see the theme of these 3 verses. If you quickly scan them, you can easily see that sin and death seem to be repeated several times. The first theme is the introduction of sin and death into the human experience. It says, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin." I already alluded to this earlier, but let me summarize this for us here. The 'therefore' reminds us that in chapters 1-4 Paul hammered home the fact that even though we are all sinners with no hope of salvation, God saved us from eternal destinies of destruction by grace through faith. Then last week he encouraged us to celebrate God and life. Now he is going to go on to give us a model of how to understand life and reasons to celebrate. First, he wants to give us confidence that we made the right decision in following Christ and secondly, he wants to assure us that we are not crazy when we struggle with sin in our

lives. Finally, he wants us to understand how Jesus' death on the cross 2,000 years ago can have power in our lives today.

I'm glad we just finished studying through Genesis, because several themes in Genesis apply directly to the book of Romans. We know that God created the world, including Adam and Eve, perfectly and there was no death or decay. We said that the modern day laws of physics, chemistry, and biology couldn't be applied to the world before sin. I think if Christians and evolutionists took time to really think about this, we would not be so far apart since our modern way of determining age is used by the carbon dating method which works on death and half-lives, however, before the fall, nothing died.

#### A. THE INTRODUCTION OF SIN AND DEATH

So Adam and Eve are in the Garden. They are given dominion of everything on earth. Now this is critical to Paul's argument now and later in Romans; when Adam and Eve rebelled against God's specific command, "not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," they received the death sentence from God. There are two things we must point out here; first, death in the Bible never means the cessation of existence, death never means that we stop living, death means separation. On the day they sinned, Adam and Eve died spiritually and they died emotionally therefore they were separated from one another. They were separated from God they broke their relationship with God. They would die physically, some day their spirit would be separated from their bodies. From that moment on, their physical bodies, including their minds and emotions would deteriorate until finally they would no longer function. Their spirits would enter eternity while their bodies returned to dust. That is what we have all inherited from Adam and Eve. We are all born into this world spiritually dead and like them, our natural bent is towards evil. We all want our own way, and we all want to be God. We are born separated from

God and we are born emotionally dead. We are alienated from one another. Even though we are all humans, race, gender, economic status, culture, and religion divide us. Finally, we are all born physically towards death; from the time we are born, we are inevitably headed for decay, sickness, and death. We will all experience the separation of our spirits from our bodies, except of course those of us who are present for the rapture and the return of Christ. Adam, as the doorkeeper, let sin and death into this world. But, sin and death not only affected humans, it affected all of creation. Adam was the head, and all that was under him experienced the same fate.

We as Westerners may have trouble with this concept of solidarity but those who come from tribal backgrounds such as Africans and Asians understand this concept well. For example, if a tribal chief or a Samurai are disgraced, his whole clan experiences the shame and disgrace. As our tribal head, we all are forensically guilty and legally we stand guilty before God because of Adam's sin.

#### B. THE UNIVERSALITY OF SIN AND DEATH

But these verses also demonstrate the universality of sin. If you look carefully at verse 12, you will notice that the verse is constructed poetically; it starts out and ends with the concept of sin. The first part lets us know that sin produces the last phrase states that all have sinned and the two middle parts describe death. So the passage is set up like this. Sin produces death all die because all have sinned. So not only are we forensically guilty because we inherit the death of Adam's sin. We are experientially guilty because each of us individually sin. That's what Paul recaps for us in verses 13-14. Remember, in chapters 1-4 Paul said that we all, in some way, are exposed to the will of God. The Jews had God's written, revealed law and that law was very specific however, even those without this written law had God's natural law and moral law. The

fact that all peoples continued to die between Adam and Moses demonstrates that all have sinned even apart from God's specific law as revealed in the Bible. There is no one without excuse sin is universal. If we take an honest look at ourselves, we don't have to search too far to know that this describes us as well. When we say that sin is universal, we must make that personal as well. I have sinned and I will die. In my natural state, I am separated from God and other human beings. My natural tendency is to be self-centered and I can clearly see that my physical existence is deteriorating much quicker than I am comfortable with.

Look at the last phrase in verse 14 it almost seems to be a throwaway comment. Describing Adam it says, "Who was a pattern of the One to come." The word for pattern in Greek is "tupos" which would better be translated as type. Adam is a type of Jesus. How can that be? Adam has just been described as the father of sin and death. Adam is responsible for the bent we have towards sin and death. How can he be a type of Christ?

### C. THE INTRODUCTION OF AN ALTERNATIVE

Let me answer that, and some very common criticism of Paul's writing style at the same time. Here we have the introduction of an alternative to Adam. First, look at verse 12, it appears to be an incomplete sentence that Paul never seems to finish. He starts out with "just as," and never seems to finish it. Maybe the sentence is not finished as neatly as we would like grammatically, but the thought is clearly finished in this passage. It will be a comparison of Adam to Christ. Just as Adam's sin and disobedience led to death, Jesus' righteousness and obedience leads to life.

Adam is a type of Christ in two ways they are both representatives of the human race and secondly, their actions affect all of human kind.

From this section, it is important to understand that we are sinners by birth and sinners by personal choice: BECAUSE WE ARE ALL CHILDREN OF ADAM AND EVE, OUR NATURE AND BENT ARE TOWARDS SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCE, DEATH. That is the predicament we all find ourselves in.

II. TWO LEADERS CONTRASTED (Vs. 15-17)  
**AS CHILDREN OF GOD, WE NOW HAVE THE ABILITY TO CONQUER SIN AND DEATH BECAUSE JESUS AND HIS WORK IS MUCH MORE POWERFUL THAN ADAM AND HIS DISOBEDIENCE.**

But praise God that's not the final word. In verses 15-17 the two leaders are contrasted I think this concept is extremely critical for us to understand. AS CHILDREN OF GOD, WE NOW HAVE THE ABILITY TO CONQUER SIN AND DEATH BECAUSE JESUS AND HIS WORK IS MUCH MORE POWERFUL THAN ADAM AND HIS DISOBEDIENCE. It is correct for us to picture our old nature in conflict with our new nature however, it would be wrong to give them equal weight. Look at the comparative words in these three verses. In verses 15 and 16 Paul says that Jesus and His works are "not like" Adam's and in verses 15 and 17 Paul emphatically reminds us that the blessings of Christ far surpass the damage of Adam by using the phrase "how much more." In fact, Jesus is so far superior to Adam that Adam's name is not even mentioned.

A. THROUGH JESUS OR ADAM

Let's look at some of the comparisons in these verses where we are invited to examine the conduits where we receive things through Jesus or Adam. We all have no choice in being related to Adam; however, look at this little phrase in verse 17. In the middle of the verse it says, "Those who receive God's abundant provision." So we all have a choice in being related to Jesus. I think this will become important later. In our physical birth, we had no choice we are all children of Adam. However, when Jesus died and rose from the dead, He broke the power of

sin. He died for us and continues to give us the choice of being related to Him. Let's continue to examine what we inherit from Adam, and how what we receive in Jesus is so far superior.

#### B. GRACE vs. DEATH

Grace versus death. Look how verse 15 starts; the gift is not like the trespass. The word for trespass means to take a misstep or a wrong step. It's like being in the Middle East these days where any false step you take could set off a hidden land mine. So Adam's misstep sets off land mines in our lives. On the other hand, Jesus is a gift given to us by God and the things that flow from Jesus are gifts as well. You may recognize the word for gifts in Greek. It is "Xarisma." We as believers are Charismatic because God gives us many gifts through Jesus.

These gifts are free; they are graces and they lead to a full and abundant life. We find ourselves reconciled to God and to one another. Our damaged emotions can be healed, and we no longer need to fear death. Grace has the power to conquer death because Jesus conquered death when He rose from the dead. So grace is much more powerful than death. If you think about it, Adam's fall was a misstep. God's grace is an intentional deliberate gift. No mistake.

#### C. RIGHTEOUSNESS vs. JUDGMENT

Next, we see that Jesus is superior to Adam that because of His act of obedience, His righteousness is far superior to the judgment we face as Adam's race. In other words, in our natural state, because of Adam's disobedience, we were headed for judgment by God. Paul demonstrated nicely earlier in the book that there is nothing we can do to avoid this judgment based on our own attempts at being good but when we received Jesus into our lives by faith, God credited Jesus' righteousness to us. Even though we are not experientially righteous, God considers us to be righteous because He makes us His children and as His children, we no longer need to fear facing judgment.

#### D. JUSTIFICATION vs. CONDEMNATION

Which now brings us to the superiority of justification verses condemnation; in Adam, we were all headed for a guilty verdict. Because Adam sinned, because he passed on his sinful bent to us, and because we all sin individually, we were headed for that final judgment day where we would hear God say, “Guilty as charged. You are condemned to spend eternity in hell.” However, because God the Father loved us so much and the thought of sending us to hell tormented Him so, He sent Jesus to fix the problem. Because God the Son loved us so much, Jesus chose to take on human flesh, suffer and die for the punishment we deserve. Because God the Holy Spirit loves us so much, He continues to speak to the world about this sin problem. We all deserve the guilty verdict. But if we place our faith in Jesus, God declares us to be “not guilty.”

#### E. LIFE vs. DEATH

Death is that final separation from God and for those who chose to reject new life in Christ will spend eternity separated from God. Make no mistake about the power of sin. Paul says throughout the book of Romans that sin has the power to dominate us, rule over us, it can be a master to be obeyed, it pays wages, it seizes opportunities, it kills, it enslaves, and it leads to death and eternal separation from God. Sin is powerful.

But the work of Jesus on the cross is much more powerful. I want you to look carefully at verse 17. For those of us who are merely children of Adam, death will reign over us, death will rule. But look at what the contrast is for children of Jesus. We would expect the exact opposite. Where death ruled for children of Adam, we would expect that life would rule in children of Christ however, it is a much different result. It says that this applies to those who have received God’s abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness. When we receive

salvation and righteousness by grace through faith, we are made holy by God. When we become Christians, we are called saints by God. Look at the last phrase in verse 17 ‘It is the saints who will reign in life through Jesus.’ If death means separation from God for eternity, then life means union with God for eternity therefore, as children of Jesus, we will reign with Christ in eternity. We will reign as opposed to death reigning.

How much more powerful is God’s gift than Adam’s sin? Look at the last phrase in verse 15 ‘God’s grace overflows.’ ‘It’s abundant.’ ‘It’s bountiful.’ Yes, we have no choice in having to live with the consequences of being the children of Adam. We will battle our propensity to sin our whole lives long. However, we must remember, **AS CHILDREN OF GOD, WE NOW HAVE THE ABILITY TO CONQUER SIN AND DEATH BECAUSE JESUS AND HIS WORK IS MUCH MORE POWERFUL THAN ADAM AND HIS DISOBEDIENCE.**

### III. TWO LEADERS COMPARED (Vs. 18-21)

**BECAUSE CHRIST DIED, EVERYONE NOW HAS A CHOICE AS TO WHO THEY WANT TO SERVE. WE CAN CHOOSE TO SERVE CHRIST AND LIVE, OR OUR SINFUL NATURE AND DIE.**

We have been introduced to these two leaders. We have contrasted the two leaders. Now in verses 18-21 we are going to compare the two leaders for one specific reason: **BECAUSE CHRIST DIED, EVERYONE NOW HAS A CHOICE AS TO WHO THEY WANT TO SERVE. WE CAN CHOOSE TO SERVE CHRIST AND LIVE, OR CHOOSE OUR SINFUL NATURE AND DIE.**

#### A. THE POWER OF AN ACT OF DISOBEDIENCE

The key words here are “just as” and “so also.” Adam and his act of disobedience are compared to Jesus and His act of righteousness.

Let’s look first at the power of an act of disobedience. Paul now recaps what he has been saying all along that this one act of disobedience opened the door for sin and death to enter the

world. Sin and death quickly and totally dominated the cosmos. We find ourselves slaves to sin and death. Now we find ourselves sinners in two ways. First, because of Adam's sin, we are all doomed to be born as sinners, our parents were sinners, so we are born into sin their parents were sinners, so they were born in sin, all the way back to Adam. Because Adam sinned, we are forensically declared to be guilty but not only do we inherit sin and death, we are experientially guilty of sin. Not only are we guilty because of Adam's sin, we are guilty because of our own personal sin.

#### B. THE POWER OF AN ACT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Paul drives this point home in verse 20. If you don't think we have a sin nature and a natural bent for sin, study the Old Testament Law, ... or better yet, ... study "The Sermon on the Mount," (Matthew 5, 6, & 7). That should demonstrate rather quickly and dramatically how sinful we really are. I think that most of us will not argue that we are sinful. Adam's disobedience has had devastating effects on the world today, ultimately, his sin is the cause for all the wars and man's inhumanity to man.

But there is a far greater power at work. That is the power of an act of righteousness. In one powerful stroke, God defeated the power of evil. When Jesus died and rose from the dead, He set us free from the power of Adam's sin. With the death and resurrection of Jesus, God triumphed over evil. I want to draw your attention to verse 20 where it says, "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more." Now we miss the power of this in English. Let's take the word increased which in Greek is "perisseuein." It is an extravagant word; it means to abound, to be plentiful, or full. Do you get the thought? Where sin was plentiful, where sin was in abundance, where sin was full that's where God grace increased all the more. That word in Greek is "hyper-perisseuein." This means over abounds, over fills, multiplies abundance. In

other words, no matter how devastated you have been because of sin ... Adam's sin, ... other's sin, ... or even your own sin, God's grace is there for the taking and no matter how abundant the force of that sin feels, God's grace is a thousand times more powerful to heal. In the world it appears that sin rules however, the reality is that grace rules.

### C. THE POWER TO MAKE A CHOICE

The final thought we are left with is we now have the power to make a choice. We find ourselves in a struggle with sin that is inevitable. I'm speaking to believers. If you are not a believer, then no doubt you feel enslaved to sin. I would invite you to receive Jesus this morning because His desire for you is to be set free. But for believers, we must make a conscious choice at every moment to fight the sin in our life. We should expect the battle because we are indeed children of Adam, born into sin with sinful natures but the battle is winnable because we have been given new natures in the Spirit of Christ which is far stronger than that of our old natures. We must make the choice, day by day, hour by hour, and minute by minute to win the battle. BECAUSE CHRIST DIED, EVERYONE NOW HAS A CHOICE AS TO WHO THEY WANT TO SERVE. WE CAN CHOOSE TO SERVE CHRIST AND LIVE, OR OUR SINFUL NATURE AND DIE.

Paul has written this to us in order to give us confidence. His main thrust is this; as certain as we are of our connection to Adam through sin... that's how certain we can be of our salvation and victory in our connection to Jesus. You see, IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO CELEBRATE OUR LIFE IN CHRIST, WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THE STRUGGLE WE HAVE WITH SIN.

We will gradually win the battle if we have a realistic outlook of the power of sin and the greater power of grace. Listen to this story by Mike Yaconelli in his book Dangerous Wonder.

**“A few years ago I asked some friends if they would have their two-year-old daughter, Alana; color me a page out of her coloring book. When Alana colored, she never worried about lines, realism, or symmetry. It never occurred to her that something could be wrong with her work. Alana colored the page, and she brought it to me just before Sunday morning worship service. She was very proud and excited, anxious for my response. I *did* respond, in the same manner I imagine most of us would respond: I *lied*. ‘Oh, Alana, thank you for this beautiful drawing. It must have taken you a long time and it’s very special. Thank you again.’ Of course, part of me was thinking, this is terrible. Is red the only color you could use? How about yellow? Blue? Green? None of your strokes are even close to being within the lines. What’s the matter with you? Take this back and draw it again --- only do it right this time! But I couldn’t criticize Alana, in part because she exhibited grace, the grace of a child who knows it is okay to color outside the lines. Was she naïve? Sure. Would to God we all kept our childlike naiveté about grace.**

**Most of my life I heard the message loud and clear that Christianity was all about coloring within the lines and coloring well. If I was a good Christian, if I loved Jesus and wanted to please Him, if I read my Bible, prayed, and went to church, then I would get better and better at coloring. And if I lived a long and godly life, I would eventually be able to draw close to the perfect drawing.**

**Wherever that message came from, it was a lie. I am fifty five years old, and my coloring still looks like Alana’s. I believe God looks at my coloring and says, ‘Hmmmm. You certainly like the color green! Lots of passion in this stroke. I like it.’**

**Even as I write those words, I can hear the ‘concern’ of those who worry about others misunderstanding the gospel. ‘You’re not suggesting, are you that nothing matters to God? Certainly, God has standards!’**

**What I am suggesting is that God’s grace is so outside the lines of our understanding that we can only stand in awe and wonder. Christianity is about the joy of coloring. The grace of God is preposterous enough to accept as beautiful a coloring that anyone else would reject as ugly. The grace of God sees beyond the scribbling to the heart of the scribbler --- a scribbler who is similar to two thieves who hung on crosses on either side of Jesus. One of the two asked Jesus to please accept his scribbled and sloppy life into the kingdom of God ... and He did. Preposterous. And very good news for the rest of us scribblers.”**

**All I want in life is a closer walk with God. How about you?**