

Romans

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September 4, 2024
Romans 5:12-17



Vss. 12-14

- In the second half of Ch. 5, Paul goes into great detail concerning the tension between Sin and Grace and the connection between Adam and Jesus Christ. But Paul does so in a way that is difficult for modern readers to follow. In truth, the entire second half of the chapter is one long sentence and in the middle Paul breaks off and goes down a whole other path. For us, we might wonder how or why or where he's going, but for those reading it in Rome in the 1st century, and especially the Jews, it make perfect sense. So to help we need to understand two of the filters the jews would have been processing the letter.
- First is solidarity. The Jews traditionally never had a concept of individualism as we do. In Western culture we have elevated the individual above all else. There is no longer much talk of "the common good" for we are common with no one. It is the individual and his/her rights that are all important. The Jews of Paul's time would have found this appalling. The Jews always viewed themselves as part of a family, clan, or tribe, and the nation of Israel. All interlocked and interwoven together in every way. Paul saw Adam this way. We ask, "What does the sin of one individual long ago have to do with me?" For Paul, Adam was a part of all humanity, interlocked and interwoven. To Paul, all humanity sinned through one man because of the **solidarity** of humanity.
- Second, there is the direct link between Sin and Death. The idea from Genesis is that Adam would have remained immortal had he not sinned. When Adam sinned, it was an act of rebellion and broke the relationship between humanity and the Giver of Life. Now recall that Paul spent the earlier chapters in a faux argument with an imaginary Jewish opponent. Here too he anticipates a question: "If the Law did not come until Moses, then how could people who came before Moses be held accountable for breaking a law that didn't yet exist?" How? Because they had sinned in Adam and bore the same punishment. Again, Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". We are all sinners. And we all share in the consequence: Death.

- At this point the outlook for humanity looks grim. But God so loved this sin-filled, dying world, He sends Jesus who offers perfect goodness and Life. Just as all humanity was involved in Adam's sin, all are invited to participate in Jesus' perfect goodness and love. Just as Adam's sin was the cause of death so Jesus' perfect goodness and love conquers death and offers all people eternal life. Paul argues that since the Law has come and made sin much more terrible, the grace, goodness, and love of Christ is greater than the condemnation which the Law brings.

Vss. 15-17

- “But the free gift is not like the transgression.” The transgression, sin, like an unstoppable infection, came from one person to all humanity. The cure, that is, the Grace of Christ, comes also from one person, but it is not automatic or a forgone conclusion. It is a gift. It is something that was offered. But it not something that is forced. What the gift offers is a way out, a rescue, a lifeline, but it is a lifeline that we must grasp.