

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Pastor Adam Parker

11/23/2025

Sermon Title: The Unbearable Life of the Two-Headed Man

Sermon Text: Romans 5:12-21

Rom. 5:12 ¶ Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

Rom. 5:13 for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.

Rom. 5:14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

Rom. 5:15 ¶ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

Rom. 5:16 And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

Rom. 5:17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Rom. 5:18 ¶ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

Rom. 5:19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Rom. 5:20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

Rom. 5:21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Main Point: While all mankind are born “in Adam” and face the death that was promised to Adam in his sin, we are offered the opportunity to be “in Christ” instead.

Outline:

1. The Condemnation in Adam
2. The Commendation in Christ

Introduction

What we have here today is really the end-point that Paul has been moving toward over the last couple of weeks, as we’ve pressed our way through the end of Romans chapter 5. I’ve belabored this issue of original sin and original guilt because Paul uses it as the backdrop for how he gets us to understand the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.

When I use the word “imputation,” I am using a Scriptural term for how God reckons, credits, or accounts something to someone that properly belongs to another. “Imputation” is the word for how God looks at you or me and regards us as having the same righteousness that Jesus has.

And embedded in Paul’s argument is this understanding that some people might think, “This is crazy. If you weren’t righteous, and God knows everything about you... then how can God regard you as righteous? He knows better than that.”

So Paul basically defends imputation by saying, “We’re used to imputation. It’s how we all have sin from Adam.”

So Paul is getting us to understand: God *does* impute sin. And therefore, it is also entirely consistent with God’s character and his previous dealings with human

beings for him [not just to impute *sin*, but] to also impute *righteousness* – specifically the righteousness of Christ.

In Adam you sinned. But he holds out the answer to that horrible situation: in Christ you are righteous. So today in a sense I want to gather together all of Paul's argument that he's been making so that we can really wrap our heads and hearts around what Paul is doing.

From the beginning of this letter, Paul has been pushing us and pushing us toward faith in Jesus Christ: a faith that doesn't rest on ourselves or our works, or some contribution we make to our own justification. Instead, he wants us to see that there is no hope in us, and that it's all in Christ.

And this whole letter up to this point has been Paul stripping us of our self-confidence, taking away our hope if it isn't found in Jesus. All of it meant to lead to one conclusion: your only hope is in Jesus Christ and him alone, and having a righteousness that is not your own, but that is found only in Christ, the suffering servant and savior of sinners.

He's taking everything from us, and giving it all to Jesus.

So let's bring everything together here today. First, the condemnation in Adam. Second, the Commendation in Christ.

I called this sermon "The Unbearable Life of the Two-Headed Man." And I gave it that title because what Paul is really doing is setting before us this important choice: you can't have two heads. You can't have Adam as your head, and also Christ as your head. You will have to choose. You can't hedge. There is no third way. There is only this choice: who will it be: Adam, the failed head of the human race? Or Jesus Christ, the righteous, victorious, and sufficient savior of sinners?

1. The Condemnation in Adam

First, Paul has set before us the condemnation we experience in Adam.

He's really making the case against Adam. Paul's saying, you don't want Adam as your head. Why? Well, look at the language here again from verse 12:

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned... Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come” (5:12, 14).

And then Paul elaborates more on what it means that Adam’s sin spread to all men. In verse 16 he says, “The judgment following one trespass brought condemnation.”

So because Adam is the head of the human race, everyone who is connected to Adam with him as their head shares in his sin. We don’t just have a sickness, Paul says. We have condemnation – a judgment by God against the very reality of who we are because of whom we come from.

If Adam is your head, you will share in everything that his sin deserves, and that includes the guilty verdict against him and all of us.

[Excursus on the Historical Adam]

Now, there is something I want to mention at this point, and it may not be something that is on your mind, but Paul believes in a real, historical Adam. Paul believes there was a real man and woman whom humanity came from, and who was the head and source of all of us as human beings.

Paul’s view is in contrast to what you might call the Mythological Adam view that emerged in the midst of modern liberal theology. The mythological view sees Adam not as the first man in history but as a literary, symbolic, or archetypal figure representing humanity’s universal experience of sin or Israel’s covenant story. This view sees Genesis 2–3 as myth or theological narrative instead of as historical record, and it also sees Paul’s references to Adam such as we have in today’s text as employing that symbolic tradition to make theological points rather than affirming Adam’s literal existence. They basically say, “You don’t need a real historical Adam to get the point that we are all sinners.” This approach generally comes from attempts to harmonize Scripture with evolutionary accounts of human origins. Some proponents of

this view include liberal theologians such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, neo-orthodox thinkers like Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, and modern scholars such as Peter Enns. This is what you might call the “mythical Adam” view.

Now, I don’t hold to that view, just to be clear.

My view is what I feel pretty comfortable calling the biblical view. Or you might call it the historical Adam view says that Adam was a real man, the first human created by God, from whom all people descend, and whose fall into sin brought corruption and death to the entire human race. This view sees Genesis 2–3 as a true historical account and regards Paul’s treatment of Adam in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 as depending on Adam’s existence—just as Christ is a real man, so too Adam has to be real for the parallel between him and to stand.

Within this framework, original sin and human depravity are understood to stem from Adam’s disobedience, imputed to all his descendants. I would argue, not only was this Paul’s view, but it’s clearly Jesus’ own view. And this has been the dominant understanding of Adam in Christian history. It was held by church fathers, later writers like Augustine, Reformers such as John Calvin, and enshrined in Reformed confessions like the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Three Forms of Unity; *all* of them saying Adam was a real historical individual.

But I want you to imagine Paul’s argument here for a moment if, hypothetically, there was no historical Adam (if all of this was just a metaphor or a parable). Suddenly all Paul is doing is telling a creative and interesting story, but not a real explanation of sin and death.

The problem for the mythological view of Adam is that Paul sees himself as giving a literal explanation for why it is that you and I sin, why we get sick, why we die, and how we got this way. Take away Adam, and you just have a sad story of sick and dying sinners but with no actual understanding of how we got here or what is really wrong with us. So you can see why it’s really important that we affirm that Adam was a real individual.

[End Excursus on the Historical Adam]

And as we'll see later, if God did not actually impute the sin of Adam to Adam's descendants, then we lose all confidence in being able to believe that Christ's righteousness can be imputed to his descendants. You see, it's only because God really did this before with Adam that we can be confident that he can and will do it again with Christ and all those who are in him.

Now, consider this though: what do you get with Adam as your head? Paul tells us: we get death. We get sin. We get shame. We get sorrow. We get God's righteous verdict against us. We lose everything if we stay here in Adam. We continue to live alienated from God, who made us and created us to know him. Adam is a terrible federal head. Adam's headship is not a tolerable state of affairs.

If you've been here for this Romans series so far, then you know that I've talked a lot about our sin, and our fallenness. We've really spent a lot of time talking about original sin and original guilt. You might think, "man, this guy has a complex. He needs therapy." But what I would say is that we really need this, or Paul wouldn't keep coming back to it over and over again.

St. Augustine, in one of his sermons (Sermon 137 on confession of sins) says this: "The first part of health is to know the disease; you cannot be healed of a sickness if you are unwilling to confess you are ill." In a world full of people who think they are good enough, who are constantly telling us how great we are: who are constantly advertising to us that we should believe in ourselves, we need Scripture to counter-program us.

Here is how Martin Luther said it: "The recognition of sin is the beginning of salvation. For unless sins are recognized, the grace of Christ cannot be known." (*Lectures on Romans*, commenting on Romans 3:20)

It is crucial to the gospel that we face hard facts about ourselves. In this case, Paul presses us to believe that we are ruined sinners. He doesn't do this to make us hopeless. He's acting like a surgeon showing us the bullet wound and explaining why and how the healing will happen.

As David said, we are sinners from our mother's womb – from the moment of our conception. This is how deep our helplessness is. It is the sort of humility that we

ought to approach the Lord with – not as deserving people with our head held high, but as a lowly sinner, a helpless sinner, coming from poor stock, beating our chest and asking God to show grace.

The question is, how can God show grace to people who have Adam as their head? Well it's not found in Adam. In Adam, we get justice. And all God's justice will give us is death as we've seen. That means that grace and hope aren't in Adam. They're in someone else.

2. The Commendation in Christ

And this means that second, Paul has set before us the commendation that is found in Christ.

In verse 15, Paul brings this incredible source of hope:

“But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.”

I should just say, part of what makes this free gift that we have in Christ so wonderful... is that God didn't have to do it. He wasn't obligated to promise a savior. He didn't have to make the promise that the serpent crusher would come. He didn't have to promise Abraham an offspring who would save the world and make his descendants more numerous than the stars in the sky. There was nothing that required him to lift poor sinners out of the grave.

St. Augustine says it this way: “God's mercy was not a debt but a gift. For he did not owe us anything but punishment; and if he has given us salvation, it is because he has freely chosen to show mercy” (Enchiridion, 98).

St. Anselm, writing in the 11th century, said this: “For what necessity or compulsion was there upon God to endure the humiliation of man's redemption, except that he loved us? O boundless love, overflowing beyond measure!” (Cur Deus Homo, 2.20).

Paul calls this a “free gift.” God was free in offering it. And even now we find that God is free in giving it, requiring nothing except that we receive the gift. He

doesn't require you to fix yourself, repair what is broken, or remedy the things in your soul that are sick. He doesn't call you to clean yourself up.

Instead, he is like the Good Samaritan on the road who sees you lying there broken, hurt, and bleeding, and needy, and he rescues you, binds you up, fully pays for your care, and personally looks to your restoration.

The man along the road had nothing to contribute to his own rescue. All he could do was receive the care of the Samaritan.

That is how free the gift of God is today.

And this is the difference: We have sinned in Adam. But in Christ we have redemption. And I want you to see how Paul weaves these things together. It's just this incredible series of contrasts. Why can't we be two-headed men, with both Adam and Christ as our heads? Because they are fundamentally incompatible. Listen to this beginning in verse 17:

Rom. 5:17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Reigning in death vs Reining in life!

Rom. 5:18 ¶ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

Condemnation vs Justification!

Rom. 5:19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Being a sinner vs being righteous!

Rom. 5:20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

Law vs Grace!

Rom. 5:21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Eternal death vs Eternal life!

This is not an even match! This should not be a difficult decision!

Because here Paul lays it all out: why is Adam a dead end? Because through Adam sin entered the world. Because through Adam *death* entered the world. Because through Adam all mankind became subject to death. Because through Adam's one original sin, condemnation came to us as his descendants. Because, as Paul says in verse 19, many were made sinners. You don't want Adam!

But why Christ? Again, it's all here: Because through him, grace abounds. Because in Christ the free gift of justification is given. Because in Christ as our head we have righteousness. Because in him we have life. And as Paul says in verse 19, in Christ's obedience, Adam's disobedience is reversed.

Adam's headship results in sin, condemnation, and death for all who are in him.

Christ's headship brings righteousness, justification, grace, and eternal life.

Conclusion

As we wrap up, I want to say a word to all of you, but perhaps especially to those who have not placed their faith in Jesus Christ yet: if you have not embraced Christ, then you are most definitely "in Adam," and the death that was promised to him will be yours if you will not come to the Lord Jesus.

I would plead with you to come to Christ, and to believe on his name, because that is where we find life. Adam is a head of death. Christ is the head of life. You have to follow one or the other: you cannot have both.

John Chrysostom in one of his sermons on the book of Romans does an excellent job of setting Paul's conclusion before us:

"The sin of one man destroyed the world, but the righteousness of one man has saved it."

The choice keeps being placed before us. What have you done with that choice? Who is your head? Is it Adam? Or is it Christ? There is no question which man you

want to follow: which head has death, and which has life. Which one will restore your happiness, and which one will confirm your misery.

The only savior of mankind in Jesus Christ. Why? Because Jesus Christ is the only descendant of Adam to have kept the law... flawlessly... never failed at it... and laid his life down for humanity as one of us. He can be our head because he is one of us. Fully man. But because he is also fully God, his sacrifice is priceless and means life for all who rest in him. Let me end with one more quote from one of John Calvin's favorite medieval theologians, Bernard of Clairvaux. And I hope you will be able to say this along with Bernard:

“How sweet a thing it is to remember that Jesus is my salvation, that He is my righteousness, my strength, and my all. He is more mine than I am my own.”
(Sermons on the Song of Songs, 20.2)

Let's pray.