



Two Ways To Be Human

Romans 5:12-21 | Mar 1, 2020

This passage is one of the most dense and complex in the whole Bible. It is also considered by many scholars to be one of the most important passages in the Bible because it explains life as we know it. This is why we are like we are in our fallenness; and why some of us are like we are in redemption. And in the end, there are only these two types of human. There are two races we might say; two humanities.

Fallen Humanity: Adam

Adam is the federal head of fallen humanity. Not only is his original sin transmitted to us upon conception, but we were complicit, or “implicit,” in his original sin. As Romans 5:12 says, “Death spread to all because all sinned”—that’s an aorist past tense action. We all sinned in Adam’s sin. We were “in his loins” (Heb. 7:9), and he was our representative.

We have examples of such theological federalism in our own world. When team captains take the field for the coin toss, their decision represents the whole team, and the result affects all. Likewise in a soccer or hockey shootout, the one player succeeds or fails for all. In war, if a general surrenders, the whole army loses. This happened to all humanity in Adam’s sin—with the added point of “biblical anthropology” that we were actually, mysteriously in Adam when it happened.

And we see how pervasive the results were: one sin led to condemnation and death for all. God didn’t even need to give other overt commandments to succeeding generations. Death reigned from Adam to Moses. And then when the full Law came at Sinai, it only increased our sinning (5:20).

Redeemed Humanity: Jesus

“But where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (5:20). Sin abounded, and grace super-abounded. Where one sin led to death, Jesus one collective act of obedience led to life for all who trust in him. Death justly followed just one sin; but justification followed *many sins*—a completely unexpected turn. We would think the multiplying of sin would only intensify our condemnation. We’d receive hell upon hell. But Jesus actually turned it all around. In fact, where Death once reigned, Romans 5:17 says that we reign in life through Christ!

Jesus undoes everything Adam did. In fact, that whole gospel, especially the Gospel of John, is a reworking of the Genesis story. It declares that “In the beginning was the Word,” and all things were made by him. The gospel writers show Jesus facing temptation, this time in the wilderness not the garden; this time in a state of profound hunger and weakness, not fully supply—and Jesus wins! He then comes back in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring order out of chaos; to be “fruitful and multiply” his redeemed community; to extend shalom to every corner of his world. Jesus heals the sick, raises the dead, and proclaims the good news of God’s kingdom.

Finally, on the sixth day, the day of Man, Jesus dies. Whereas Adam plucked fruit from the cursed tree, Jesus hung on a cursed tree for us. Whereas the earth bore thorns as a result of sin, Jesus bore thorns on his head. Whereas God *finished* creation on the sixth day, Jesus said “It is finished” on the sixth day to complete our redemption. On the seventh day he rested. Then on the first day, the first day of a New Creation, Jesus rose. He met the woman in the Garden to bring her hope and life—just like Satan met Eve to bring sin and death. He met his disciples and breathed on them and said, “receive the Holy Spirit,” just as when God made Adam, he breathed into him the breath of life. Everything old was undone. Everything new had come!

Discussion Guide

1. Read Romans 5:12-21.
2. List all the points of comparison and contrast between Adam and Jesus.
3. How does this passage show its explanatory power over all of human life? How does it explain us? How could we use a passage like this—even as dense and complex as it is—to help an unbeliever understand the human predicament and the gospel?
4. Think through the connections between the Creation and Redemption stories—between Genesis and the Gospels (especially John). The sermon drew out a number of connections. Are there others that you can think of? How is Jesus the antitype of Adam? What other typologies are there between Old Testament people and events, and Christ?
5. A biblical anthropology sees people not merely as discreet individuals, but as members of a true human family. We're profoundly and mysteriously tied to our ancestry and our community.
 - In what ways do you perceive this about yourself? How do you dwell in your ancestors, and your ancestors in you?
 - How are you tied to your family, household, and community? Do you perceive these ties as strong or weak? When we consider our linkage to our community and nation, how might our ties be stronger than we think?
 - What are the corresponding realities when it comes to Christ's new community, the church? Do you see yourself as deeply, integrally connected? How can you strengthen that connection?
6. Romans 5:17 says that through Christ we will surely reign in life. Does that mean now or later? To what degree is our dominion restored in this life, and to what degree must we wait for the next?
7. The end of the passage, verse 21, also says that grace reigns—and surely that means now.
 - What would it look like in your life, and in our life together, if we let grace hold full sway? What would be different?
 - How can you let grace reign in you today?