

The Power of One

Romans 5:12–21 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION:

G.K. Chesterton describes the family as, *“the one institution of human society that we did not choose for ourselves. We choose friends, churches, clubs, and even spouses to some degree. But we are “dropped down the chimney” into a family not of our choosing and expected to [work it all out] learn (from them, and with them) charity, patience, forgiveness, and love there first”.*

Simultaneously, I would add, the family is the **original** institution among mankind; it precedes the **state** and the **church**. As such, the **leading indicator** of the future advancement of either the Church or the state is the family's success. If families disintegrate, the other institutions will soon follow.

While the family unit is essential, it is also remarkably delicate - there are times, the church or the state may be required to step into the family to bring peace by forcibly dissolving (or removing one from) the family unit. While this is sadly necessary, it is terribly complicated. When such things happen, the hand Church must be steady as a painter and the blade of State must be as sharp as a scaple.

The key factor in determining whether the family experience will not only survive but flourish is the role of the Father, for scripture calls him the head, or the leader.

The Father, therefore, holds untold responsibility for not only his particular family but for the church, the state, and the human race as a whole - *no pressure*.

The greatest threat to our existence is NOT some random meteor slamming into our planet, nor some contagion arising from within our species. It is not the rising and falling of political or ecclesiastical leaders - it is the failure of our fathers.

This is where it gets tricky - for old scratch, Satan himself, has demonstrated his cunning. First, he attempted to eliminate the role of the Father. He drove wedges, seemingly irrevocable differences between a man and his wife, until the Husband and Father resigned his glorious position. But the accuser, with his many schemes, did not stop there, for he found that even in the roughest of family situations, you could, at times, not drive Dad away. In those cases, he sought an alternative. Not to eliminate the role of Father, but to redefine it.

Definitions, you see, are the key to everything. Until we define light, we cannot determine whether or not it is preferable to darkness, and if we define it improperly, we may define it as darkness. This has been the method of the enemy's reserve corps. Redefine the role, emasculate it, until he who holds the grand title of Father - really holds nothing at all. This is the chosen scheme of our generation.

But we have hope - you see, the blasted book will not go away. For it is the very Word of God, and it arises again and again, sometimes whispering, sometimes thundering - but always defining. It sets the terms that the enemy must pervert. It calls to us. It haunts us. It promises to us that ***if you can believe the old definitions*** and proceed accordingly, then you will rediscover that astonishing power of ONE.

One man really can make a difference. At least, that is the claim Paul makes in the text before us. That is not to say it will be easy.

CONTEXT: Being a good Father is markedly difficult. You, Paul, has already established are {most certainly} a sinner, attempting to hold a collection of sinners together in pleasant harmony, slowly but certainly progressing in their sanctification. Who is capable of such a thing?

The empirical data suggest that most of us are not. Roughly one-third of Americans who have ever married have also experienced a divorce. Many of those who do not divorce legally do so literally in that they no longer dwell together as one.

In recent days, the trends seem to be moving in a positive direction, but the data can be deceiving: it does not suggest that we are getting better at marriage and family; rather, we are increasingly deciding to avoid the institution altogether. If that is the case, this does not bode well for the future of our civilization.

Perhaps the Meteor has already struck, the contagion is already airborne, and that post-apocalyptic world that the great movies and novels warn us about already exists.

But as I have already said, there is hope, and it is found in the text before us today.

We have frequently ***applied the Law of Repetition*** by ***revisiting*** the importance of the Law of Repetition in each of the passages we have chosen.

If we apply that rule of interpretation to our text today, the point is unmistakable. ***The word "One" Appears 12 times in only 10 verses.*** Thus, our title - The Power of One.

So, for you Fathers among us - I must warn you that, if I am successful in my teaching of the text, you should feel an enormous weight of responsibility to be carried, as well as an unmistakable power and potential for good that is at your disposal. AND that responsibility and power carried by you as ONE MAN is leveraged, by degree, for the better or worse, in your relationship with two other men - one being ***Adam***, the other being ***Christ***.

TEXT: Romans 5:12-21 (ESV)

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—

NOW - Let's pause for a moment, and say a few things that must be said. You see, this text is the key text for at least **three fundamental Christian doctrines**. I will point out these three, but these are not my three main points, so I will wish the moderator (whoever that may be) will return the time I spent on these back to me at the end of the sermon:

- 1. Historic Adam** - The first and most obvious truth we must believe in order to apply this text is that there was actually a historic Adam as well as a historic Christ.

ILLUSTRATION: Scripture teaches that Satan operates in the way a Roman Corp may have operated. Setting up Legions, with various authorities around the world. Even Satan Himself has a throne according to John. I do not propose to tell you where he resides today. But logic would suggest it would be in a place of great influence, perhaps one of the world's major capitals. Perhaps Beijing, Moscow, London, or, most likely, Washington, D.C. When we first visited there many years ago, I was prepared for it to be covered with all that

was perverse and sensual - prostitution and strip clubs on every corner. That was not the case; it was a lovely city. I thought perhaps I had gotten it wrong, until I wandered into the museums of state where all of the accumulated learning of the ages supposedly dwelt - there I found echoed again and again, you are a random accident, with no purpose, no meaning, no destiny, you are here because of the random collision of particles that happened millions upon millions of years ago. Ah, there is the strategy, you see the logic of scripture rests upon certain presuppositions, chief among them is that there was a man in history named Adam who is primarily responsible for the state we are in. Erase historic Adam, and the argument of the text falls apart. Paul will not allow it.

2. **Federal Headship** - If the sin of Adam imputed guilt onto Adam, followed by its irrevocable consequence of death, then the created order itself demands that each thing can only reproduce after its kind. Like begets like. Dogs produce puppies, Cats produce kittens, and sinners produce sinners. Not one time in all of recorded history has a cat produced a puppy, nor has a sinner given birth to a saint. Adam is responsible for humanity's corruption.

David said it this way - **Psalm 51:5 (ESV)**

⁵ ...brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Remember, however, it was not actually Adam who sinned first, but Eve - yet Eve was not held responsible for the fall of humanity, Adam was. What might have happened if Adam refused the fruit? Perhaps God would have provided another, and only Eve would have suffered the consequences. We will never know. Either way, Adam is the most responsible party for many reasons.

Which brings us to the third doctrine established by this primary text...

3. **Original Sin** - Because Adam acted as the **representative head** of the human race in corrupting humanity by sin, the guilt of his sin is **imputed** upon all his progeny.

Now, those are difficult theological concepts to comprehend, but perhaps they will become clearer as we look at each of these men individually - Adam, Christ, and Yourself. Now to the sermon proper...

1. One Man - Adam

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**—

It has been correctly stated that the Greek word for "**Sin**" means to miss the mark as one would fail to hit the bullseye at darts or archery. However, a text like this reminds us not to move too quickly past the gravity of the word, but to feel it and allow its repercussions to sink in.

The particular way in which Adam missed the mark was substantial. He believed the serpent's word over the Creator's. He directed his faith, not only to a created being, but to the leader of the rebellion, the most fallen of God's creation - that ancient dragon Satan. Satanism became his religion.

D.A. Carson says it well - *the sin of Adam was much deeper than simply taking a bite of fruit; it was the deGodding of God.*

In committing that first sin, sin (as though a thing) entered into the very DNA of humanity; it crept into the deepest recesses of the human soul, and death came with it. Thus, generation after generation, two things remain predictable - Death and Taxes.

Again, we must take a moment to define our terms. **What is sin?** One might say that sin is the breaking of God's law. If that is the case, we can understand how Adam sinned and why Adam died. There was only one law, "do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," and he broke it; thus, he sinned, thus he died.

But what of Cain? There was no law forbidding fratricide or murder? That would come later through Moses - so why did Cain die? Because sin is more than a violation of a commandment. It is some *thing* that touches every part of our being. Every molecule, every crevasse of the soul. That's the point of verse 13 -

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

So, Adam fell, and IN ADAM, all of humanity fell, and sin and death were passed to every living man, woman, or child - thus making them accountable as sinners.

The power of one Adam... but now enters into the conversation, the second One...

2. One Man - Christ

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.

Now Paul holds Adam and Christ side by side, and four times he warns us not to imagine the two halves are equal: "the free gift is not like the trespass."

Yes, both are representative Heads whose one act decides the destiny of many, but the gift towers immeasurably over the offense.

In other words, what Christ did by bearing our sin and paying our debt didn't just simply set the record in balance, leaving the books at zero - it FAR OVERPAID.

Where sin has abounded, grace MUCH MORE abounded... you see?

We are not simply taken back to the status that Adam enjoyed prior to the fall, but we are given something far superior to that state of innocence; we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ Himself.

Feel the asymmetry - On Adam's side, it took only one sin to bring down the verdict "condemned". But in Christ, through His gift comes, not the setting right of one sin, but the setting right of the whole accumulated mountain of human rebellion throughout the ages.

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.

So they differ not only in their potency, but in their effect. One brings something very bad - eternal death in a place called Hell. The other, eternal life, is received the moment one truly believes and will be fully experienced in a New Heaven and New Earth, with a resurrected body, forever and ever.

So Paul has spoken of two men - Adam, and Christ, Now he will address the third - yourself...

3. One Man - Yourself

If Paul is right, you see, entire legacies can be overturned. Sins and curses that have haunted a family for generation after generation can be revoked by one man's decision.

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.

Let me draw your attention to that phrase, "those who receive". Are you among "those who receive?"

18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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. 20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

But wait a minute, preacher - you said that this part is about me, where am I in this text? Well, let me clarify - you may be, or you may not be numbered among the "Many in verse 19. You see, he says very clearly that MANY will be made righteous, not all.

If all were declared righteous by virtue of the death of Christ, we would be universalists; we most certainly are not.

The word is clear - many.

- Are you among the many who recognize that they are sinners by nature and sinners by choice?

- Are you among the many who recognize that not only do they stand guilty for the sin inherited from Adam, but as we read earlier, all have sinned?
- Are you among the many who have believed that the sacrificial atonement of Jesus Christ is capable of not only freeing you from the guilt of Adam's transgression, but also abounding far more, even imputing to you the righteousness of Christ Himself?

If you are ONE of those among many who believe such things from the very depths of your soul. Then the Title Father should not frighten you. It should give you great hope.

If Adam is capable of such destructive power as one man. What do you suppose you are capable of, clothed in the righteousness of Christ?

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

Now, let me speak to the father who came in here today, already certain he has failed — because that is exactly the man this text was written for.

If your hope is in your performance as a father, then either **pride** or **despair** is the only place you can end up, and both of them will wreck you and your family.

But Paul is suggesting that your family's legacy and your children's hope were never based upon ***your competence in the first place, but rather upon Christ.***

And your primary job as a Dad isn't to be the perfect Dad, but to point the imperfect child to the perfection of Christ.

Every single one of us is born into Adam's house; we did not choose it, any more than we chose our family. But the door of the house stands open, and the strange thing about that door is that it can only be walked through alone — not one man is saved as a member of a crowd, but one by one, we must enter into the home, through the one door, who is Christ.

And here is the ultimate joke at the heart of the universe, the one the devil never really understood: he spent all his cunning teaching men they were accidents, and in doing so, he made them feel small. But the smallest man at the smallest kitchen table, if he is a father and a believer, is wielding a power older than empires.

The accuser whispers, "You are nothing." Heaven thunders back, "You are a man, one man." One man was enough to ruin the entire world. One man was enough to save it.

And the wonder of the ages is not that the task is heavy. The wonder is that it was ever handed to a creature so small, and that grace makes the small creature equal to it.

In the end, you are ONE MAN, following and pointing others toward one of two MEN - Adam or Christ. Choose wisely, and make this a happy Father's Day.