

THE NEW HUMANITY

Romans 5:12–21

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Romans 5:12–21 (NIV)

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Just a comment before we actually begin looking devotionally at this Scripture. It’s a difficult one, and there’s no Scripture in probably all of Paul’s letters that we could turn to which would more adequately illustrate what Peter is talking about when he says, “There are some things Paul

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writes which are difficult to understand.” It’s because Paul has this super-genius mind—giving him both a natural ability, and also, by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, one which sometimes lets his thinking get ahead of his words. As he’s writing in the Spirit, he thinks of a parenthesis which he should insert. So he starts off by saying in verse 12, “Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sin...” What he intends to do with that sentence is exactly what he does in verse 18, when he finally comes back to the theme he started. Between verses 13 and 17 there’s a whole parenthesis. He is saying there is a comparison between Adam’s sin and Christ’s righteousness. So he finally comes back to the theme in verse 18 that he started in verse 12. “Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men,” that’s verse 12. Now the new theme: “so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men.” And in between verses 12 and 18, he’s taking a very conscious thought of the person who’s sitting in his audience who is trained to think in the Old Testament and who is raising certain objections like: “What is the place of the Law in all of this grace you’re talking about? You’re talking about Adam. What about Moses? What about the entrance of sin through the Law and the like?” So he covers that through some parenthetical statements.

Our purpose today in looking at the Scripture will not be so much to go through it from a word-by-word, verse-by-verse, systematic development, but try to back off and see as a whole what Paul is talking about in this whole section. If we go back to the roots of the Book of Romans, we find that the theme is stated in verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1, where Paul—like a modern preacher today—will take a theme of Scripture and use that as the text, and then develop it. Paul is using a text by a prophet by the name of Habakkuk, the fifth prophet from the end of the Old Testament. A prophet who lived seven centuries before Christ, who lived in a time when his nation was about to fall to an invading power. This prophet, Habakkuk, looked at the tremendous

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sin of his own people, and he asked God why He wasn't doing anything about the injustice. And God said, "I'm going to do something about the injustice. I'm sending the Babylonians from the northeast. They're going to come, and they're going to punish those who have been unjust."

Habakkuk says in modern lingo, "Oh my! The Babylonians! They're worse than anybody in Judah. God, how could You do this?" And Habakkuk goes up to his tower in Habakkuk chapter 2 and waits for the answer. God essentially says to him, "You cannot understand all My ways within the span of a given lifetime. You cannot see how, over the course of time, I will even the score and bring judgment with equity. So that, as a righteous man, you are going to sometimes have to cope with situations and questions for which you do not have immediate answers. But I'll tell you this, Habakkuk. The righteous man shall live by his faith, by his trust in God, who will gather all things to himself and will distribute justice and righteousness with equity." This satisfies the prophet. The righteous through faith are the ones who will live in God's eyes.

Paul takes this Scripture from Habakkuk, and out of it comes the whole development in Romans. He starts off by saying, "How is a man righteous by God? Is he righteous on his own?" The answer is no. He proves it by the Gentile world, the heathen world of the first century. And even by looking at the religious world, the Jewish world, he says, "No, man is not righteous by God on the basis of what he does." How, then, is he righteous? Man becomes righteous through a free gift which is offered in Jesus Christ.

To illustrate this some weeks ago as we began Romans 3:21—which marks the great divide from condemnation to justification—I used the story of my brother, who, when I had done something wrong and he was innocent of that deed himself, offered to take the punishment that would be given to me. His offer was declined, and I took the punishment. But in the case of our Elder Brother Jesus, He offered on our behalf to take the punishment due us. And with His sinless life, He was, therefore, acceptable to receive that punishment—and having borne it, we are set free by

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God. We are justified. We are declared righteous. The punishment has been borne, and we are no longer separated from God once we are in Christ Jesus.

This theme, therefore, of being made righteous in God's eyes is not something we do on our own. It is a gift, a sheer gift, from Christ to us—who stood in our place and bore our sins. This principle is a principle not having been begun by Jesus himself, but having been the plan of God for all humanity through the ages. It's Paul's purpose in Romans 4 to show how Abraham, the great patriarch of the Old Testament, himself was justified through his faith in God.

In the early part of Romans 5, we looked at the benefits that flow from this justification. Now as Paul comes into the latter part of Romans 5, he is now bringing to a conclusion this whole section which began in 3:21 on justification—how it is that we are made right with God, the effects of that being made right with God. And now in this latter part of chapter 5, he is putting in broad relief that one who stands outside of this justification by faith belongs to one stream of humanity with a head of that stream called Adam. And that those who have accepted this justification belong to a new humanity headed by a new Representative, a new Man, Jesus Christ. This great divide, where he sees that all mankind is divided into these two camps—Adam and Christ—is his theme here in Romans 5.

Next week when we take up Romans 6, we'll reach into a new area of Romans where Paul is then not talking simply about how it is that we're made righteous in God's eyes, but how it is that we work out this justification. The term that we'll be using a lot then will be "sanctification."

Here, though, in Romans 5:12–21, Paul is stating all of mankind is divided into two camps. You belong to one of two humanities, if you will. And all within this room today are not excepted from that statement of the apostle.

I. He spends a good deal of time talking about Adam, first of all.

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That's his point of comparison. Adam is a type of Christ. That is to say if you want to know the things which Christ did, then to get a full understanding of it, look at what Adam did. For Christ is exactly reverse—and even more than reverse—what Adam did. He's going to go beyond what Adam did.

The modern audience has some difficulty with the term Adam, because we've been so inculcated within our secular educational system to believe that Adam represents a mythological understanding of ancient man in respect of the origins of humanity. However, the Scripture is very explicit of the realness of this person, Adam. It's not a doctrine confined to the Old Testament, but in the New Testament itself—on the words of our Lord and the words of the apostles—is the very direct understanding that Adam is a real human being, the beginning of the human race. This biblical teaching and this knowledge which we have as Christians is in real contrast to the theory of man, the anthropological view of man, which is afloat in the world today, which basically says something like this: Man started low, and now has gotten to a point where he is reaching for the stars. This development of man is on an upward spiral—at least he has developed that way technically and scientifically. Some, then, within the stream of the modern theory would say man started low, reached for the stars, and is going to crash to the depths.

Scriptures, on the other hand, say something entirely opposite. Scriptures say man started high. He is articulate. He is able to reason. He is able to give meaningful names to beings and to things—therefore, able to articulate and to imagine and to have fellowship with God. He walks with God in the coolness of the day. Man started high and, through sin, crashed to the depths—but, through Christ, can again be raised to the heights. Indeed, not only raised to the heights which he started from, but raised to a higher height than what he started from in the beginning.

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So the historicity, or the realness, of Adam is a cardinal thing. One can hardly be a believer in the Scripture—one can hardly be a Christian—without accepting the verification of the Scripture witness on this point. It is a crucial doctrine to be advanced in Scripture. We start from one stream.

This, then, leads us to another important thing that comes from, you might say, the doctrine of Adam. And that is, since we had one common originating point, there is a unity, therefore, to the human race.

Paul, preaching to the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17, will say that from one blood God has made all of the nations. So that in the Christian sense, when Christians truly understand the Scripture, there can never be a discrimination towards anyone on the basis of their nationality, or their race, or the like. It is from one that all humanity springs. Even as in Adam we are all one, so Christ presents a new opportunity also to work cross-culturally and cross-nationally, cross-ethnically, with mankind to draw them into one with Him. This is a point we'll come to a little bit down the road.

So given these two things—that Adam is real, and that Adam represents this unity within the human race—we come to what Paul is saying here in Romans 5. He is talking about something theologians call “original sin.” There’s nothing original about it in the sense we use the word “original.” It is original in the sense that sin with Adam is new, and, therefore, it is begun through him. The question is often raised for persons who study the Bible, “Does God hold me responsible for Adam’s sin, or for my own sin?” Of course, Paul up to this point in the Book of Romans, has been saying God holds us responsible for our own sin. That’s his whole point from Romans 1:18 through 3:20. In the non-Jewish world and the Jewish world alike, their actions and their motives are probed, and it is understood that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Real and actual sin. We’re held responsible for our own sins.

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Where did we get this nature to sin? This is what Paul comes to in Romans 5, and he takes the actions to sin to a deeper level and says that there is a nature which we have from Adam which has involved us in Adam's sin. Somehow we're involved in what he did. This is extremely difficult for us in modern America, with our twentieth-century, individualistic culture to understand and grab hold of. We like to think that we're not responsible for anyone else's actions, and no one else is responsible for ours. As John Donne, however, has said, "No man is an island entire unto himself." It's kind of a poetic concept. In our American culture, we have a difficult time—with our stress on individualism—to see this. Yet there is the decided teaching within Scripture that mankind is bound up in what Adam himself did.

This is made clear time and time again in this passage today. Look at it just for a moment. Verse 12: "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin. And death spread to all men." Verse 15: "If many died through one man's trespass..." Verse 17: "If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man..." Verse 18: "Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men." What the apostle Paul is clearly saying here is somehow we are bound up and involved in what Adam did. It's a theological theme you might say is called solidarity—that mankind as a whole is seen as incorporated, or being involved in, Adam as a community.

This theme, as explained in Scripture, helps us to get at what Paul is saying here. When we look over in Hebrews 7, we find a kind of a unique story in respect to tithing or giving. It has to do with a greater priesthood that has appeared than the priesthood of Levi. That's the eternal priesthood of Melchizedek, a reference to an Old Testament story. It says that Abraham paid tithes to this Melchizedek. On the human level, at the time this letter to the Hebrews is being written, people were paying tithes to the tribe of Levi. The author wants to show how the tribe of Levi itself owes obedience to Jesus Christ. Melchizedek represents Christ. So we have this

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astonishing statement: that when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, Levi—who came 150 or so years later—actually himself paid tithes to Melchizedek, for at that time Levi was in Abraham’s loins. Therefore, all through the stream of human history, whenever the tribe of Levi is receiving tithes, at one point, however, they were as a people in the ancestry of Abraham their father paying tithes to Melchizedek. There’s a solidarity of Abraham and his decedents with himself. So that even though it’s Abraham acting, we see that all his later generations are bound up in what he did. Therefore, Hebrews 7:9 specifically says, “One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.”

The closest thing I know to explain in a modern sense of what this solidarity represents that Hebrews 7 and Romans 5 are talking about—that we’re bound up with something someone else has done a long time ago—is this last week I was talking to my uncle. You know, you learn a lot from uncles you don’t learn from parents. My uncle was telling me this fascinating story that my great-great-grandfather was a boy of sixteen years of age during the American Revolution, and he lived until he was 113 years of age. His wife lived until she was 103. And my grandmother was a child when this great-grandfather was still alive. So that I am only one generation, if you will, removed from the American Revolution, as my grandmother—who I saw—saw a person who was sixteen years of age during the American Revolution. I was so excited that someone in my family had actually lived that long. I began thinking, “At the ripe age of 35, I’ve got more to go.” On my mother’s side, they lived a long time. But on my father’s side, they had heart problems. So whether I like it or not, I am somehow bound up in what has happened before, and there may be within me a biological time bomb going on which I have no control over. I am somehow bound up in the solidarity of my family and what biologically they are passing on to me.

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In kind of a small representative way, this is what Paul is talking about in Romans 5. If we want to have a real search for our roots—and genealogical research is popular today—if you really want to research roots and go all the way, then go all the way to where it started, Adam. And you will find that there has been something which has entered the stream of human history which has affected us all. And we're all bound up and caught up in, namely, two contributions Adam made to the human race: sin and death. By one man, sin entered the world. Sin here is personified. It is seen as an active force.

The best way I can represent what is happening is to think for a moment of the first Apollo mission to the moon, where the men actually got out and walked on the moon. Remember when they came back, they were put in quarantine because they were afraid that maybe on the moon they had picked up some organism which was living and which could infiltrate and affect the people that walked on the moon—and, in turn, affect all of mankind, having no immunity to what may have been picked up there. It turned out, they had picked up no such thing.

But sin has its active capacity in the sense that it is an infection which, through Adam, enters the human race—and from Adam, passes to all. And in its wake comes death. So that not only is mankind affected, but as Paul will indicate in Romans 8, the whole creation itself is affected.

And from that moment begins the downward slide until the heavens and the earth itself will one day be destroyed, bringing about an end of all that Adam had brought about in his wake.

This is bound up in Adam. This Adamic nature is not only seen in adults who make moral choices and who fall in the category of Romans 3:23: "All have sinned." But the Adamic nature extends, as well, to all of humanity, even infants. The Minnesota Crime Commission recently released a report on crime which had a fascinating observation in it. There's a secular agency saying something which illustrates what Paul is saying. They said, "Every baby starts life as a little savage. The baby is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants, when he

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wants it. His bottle, his mother's attention, his playmates, toys, his uncle's watch. Deny him these wants, and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He is dirty. He has no morals, no knowledge, no skills. This means that all children, not just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of his infancy, given free reign to his impulsive actions to satisfy his wants, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, a rapist." Incredible kind of secular conclusion to something that Saint Paul is talking about: Infection has entered the human race.

Paul very clearly notes in verse 13, "But sin is not reckoned when there is no law." Mankind is not judged or separated from God on the basis of someone else's sin. He's separated from God on his own. On the basis of sin's presence in the world, where there is no law, sin is not imputed or reckoned to his account. So we are judged on our own sin, but nevertheless, if we trace back our origins deeply enough, we learn that we have what is called an Adamic nature. That each person born into the human race is part of what, from scriptural terms, is the old humanity, the dying order. Homo sapiens is an endangered species; it's passing from the scene. If you look around and you're a careful observer of human nature, you will find that from this one man, Adam, has flowed a universal impact of sin and death. You cannot anywhere in all the history of mankind—except for two references in Scripture in respect to Elijah and Enoch—you cannot find exceptions to this rule of the fate of death. We know it. As much as we find it difficult to admit that it's going to happen to us as individual human beings, in our rational mind when we look at the odds of us surviving death as a homo sapiens, we recognize that that is not going to be done. It is indeed a trait that is passed on to the human race.

Somehow Paul is saying we're bound up in what Adam has done. He has passed certain things onto us. If the story ended there, it would be a pretty bad story. This is the difference that Christ makes in life, because Christ has come to bring a new humanity into existence. He has come as

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the second head of the human race. Paul, in paralleling this theme in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, will talk about Christ in terms like these: that there was the first Adam; there is the second Adam. There is the first Adam and there is the last Adam.

II. Christ represents a new stream coming into mankind, a stream to which we can belong and have identity with.

It is important in respect to Adam to look at the fact that he's a real human being—that there is historicity to him. Much more so, then, it's important to recognize as we begin talking about Christ that we're not talking about the mythological embodiment of a first-century religious myth. Here are persons writing the New Testament as contemporaries to this person who lived called Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Messiah.

Some national columnist said in the *Costa Mesa Daily Pilot* that there is no reputable New Testament scholar who would attest to a dating of the New Testament in the first century. All the reputable New Testament scholars say that the stories of the gospel and the like were written somewhere in the second century. This position allows one to have a good deal of myth, because people made up stories by the time the second century came around. The assumption was ludicrous because it showed that this person, whoever it was that wrote the article, had not been doing any reading at all in the field of biblical research for the last fifteen to twenty years, or thirty.

In *Time* magazine this week was an article by J. A. T. Robinson, the English bishop who wrote, several years ago, *Honest to God*, which kind of kicked off the death of God movement. All of a sudden, he decided he needed to re-examine the presupposition which covered the dating of the New Testament. He comes up with a touching conclusion that, in his opinion, all the New Testament, except maybe one book, was written before 70 A.D. As a liberal scholar, this is so incredible. He accepts the apostolic authorship of the gospels and the like. What is happening, as

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archeological work has been advancing, there has been increasing buttressing of the position that real Christians have believed in for many, many years. That is that this written here has been written by persons who had living contact with Jesus, or had living contact with the eyewitnesses of Jesus. So when we look at Jesus, we're talking about a real historical human being.

What is represented in Adam is also represented in Jesus himself. We find that Jesus will gather the human race in himself, all who will receive Him. There is no distinction on the basis of sex, no distinction on the basis of religious identity. There is no distinction on the basis of culture, national origin, or the like. All in Christ. So Christ is that perfect representative of what Adam did. But Christ is more than Adam, as Paul will indicate again and again.

What Paul is indicating here in Romans 5, and what he reiterates strongly in 1 Corinthians 15, is that when Christ comes into the scene as the head of that new humanity, He does more for us than simply restore us to the position that Adam lost. Adam was created with innocence, but he was created man. Jesus comes into human life not to bring us back to where Adam was, to bring us back to perfect human nature. But Jesus, as the divine Son of God, comes to bring us to a position that is actually higher than Adam had in the beginning. For as Peter will say in 2 Peter 1, "We have now been made partakers of the divine nature." And Paul will say in 1 Corinthians 15, in talking about the resurrection, that the first man was from the dust, but the second man is from heaven. That the first man was made a living being. But the second man was made a life-giving spirit. So whereas Adam's destiny even before he sinned was to inherit the earth and to be a man for the eternity of his existence, through Christ we are given the opportunity not simply to inherit the earth, but we are given the opportunity to inhabit eternity—and we are no longer simply terrestrial beings. We are inter-terrestrial beings, because we shall forevermore live, and rule, and reign, with Christ. And we have literally taken on His nature in us through the Spirit. Where

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our connection with Adam has been biological, our connection with Jesus Christ is spiritual. We are, therefore, placed in Christ if we belong to Him.

Paul, therefore, in contrasting Adam with Christ, keeps using that term “much more.” He says things like, “Where one man’s trespass brought condemnation after many trespasses, the one man Jesus Christ brought abounding grace.” That word “abounding” simply means “more than enough.” Grace, as we know, means unmerited favor. Grace can be an acronym—“God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.” There is more than enough grace, more than enough of God’s favor toward us, to bring us to the position in Christ that we could have never had in Adam. Whereas Adam’s life brought to the stream of mankind condemnation, Christ’s life brings to the stream of mankind justification. Whereas Adam brought death, Christ brings life. Whereas through Adam death and sin reigned—the real hold that these elements have on the human race—through Christ, life and grace reign. The phrase is used again and again: “much more.”

We might just take a moment to look through the stream of Romans 5. In verse 3, he uses the term “not only so,” which is a way of saying we know we rejoice in the glory of meeting God, but in addition to that rejoicing, we rejoice in our sufferings because we know that through tribulation God is working some things out in our life.

He uses “much more” in verse 9: “Seeing, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved from the wrath of God.” And we see it again in verse 10: “While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life.” Meaning that if, at one time in our life, God has entered our life through Jesus Christ and saved us, that is the most difficult work He had to do. And being united in His presence forevermore, or the resurrection of the body, is not nearly so difficult, in terms of God’s viewpoint, as it was to effect our reconciliation with himself in the cross of Christ. Much more. We have this. We have much more in Christ.

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Then he comes in verse 15 to say “much more” again: “Many died through one man’s trespass...much more have the grace of God and the free gift.” There’s been a greater effect of Christ’s work for us, raising us to a higher state than anything Adam could have done. And again “much more” is repeated in verse 17.

Paul, therefore, looks at these contributions of two men to the stream of mankind in which we find ourselves in solidarity. One is a biological connection. The other is a spiritual connection. Whether we like it or not, we are part of Adam when we start out. We don’t have a choice in the matter. We have human nature, and we are headed for the grave. But in Jesus Christ, we have an opportunity to receive—and to elect to receive—what God is offering us. So verse 17 reads very specifically, “Much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through that one man, Jesus Christ.”

Paul, in verse 18, will summarize what’s gone before. I’ll just mention this because it’s troubled some people in terms of what Paul is meaning here. “Then as one man’s trespass leads to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men.” Is Paul here saying something like, “All persons will eventually belong to the new stream of humanity—Christ—so it doesn’t matter what they do? If they were all affected by Adam, they will all be affected by Christ”? This is clearly, from the context, *not* what he is saying.

A word is not only determined by its dictionary meaning; it’s determined by its contextual meaning. For example, if I say, “Everybody was at our house last night,” I hope you won’t force me to say that in our house last night were crammed four billion people. I hope you will allow me to use that word “everybody” in kind of a loose sense. Sometimes the Scripture uses this word “all” in that sort of a sense. For example, coming to John the Baptist, there went out “all” to him and they were baptized by John. It doesn’t mean everybody in Judea and Jerusalem went out, but there went out a considerable segment.

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Saint Paul has just been talking in verses 15-17 about the many, and the many. You only belong to Christ by receiving Him. It's not an automatic thing. So, therefore, what he's saying in the two uses of "all" in verse 18 is something like this, "Therefore, as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men—that is, all of those involved in what Adam did—so also one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal in life for all men—that is, all of those in the new humanity. All of those affected by what Christ did. All of those who receive Christ. It's all and all." There is no one that's outside of those two all's. Either all in Adam, or if one is in Christ, one is completely in Christ—not one leg in and one leg out—all in Christ.

And we really are in Christ. Even as when we started out looking today, we saw that Hebrews 7 saying that Levi the priest was in Abraham, Paul is saying that we are in Adam. But now in a spiritual sense, we begin to think we are in Christ. In Christ. That's a very direct statement. It means something like this. I think I can illustrate through a phrase in Ephesians 2 where Paul is talking about being justified. He writes in verses 4-6: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions...And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (NIV). When is Paul writing this? Has he already died and gone to heaven? Made us sit with Christ in the heavenly places? Raised us up with Him? What the Scripture is calling for us to do is recognize that we could do nothing about our Adamic nature. We could not, if we wished to with all of our heart, live forever as a human being. We could not if we wish with all of our heart, do everything perfect or be totally righteous. Because we are sinners by nature and by choice.

By the way, if you resist, if you don't like the word "sinner" applied to you, it's striking how sin first enters the world. Most of the time we think about sin in terms of what we do to somebody else—killing and kidnapping and sexual assault and this kind of thing. But the first sin of Adam

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was nothing like that at all. It was an offense toward God, what we'd almost call something minor. It was disobedience to God's command. This being out of touch with God himself constitutes the basic nature of sin. When Jesus was asked, "What is the essence of the law?" He said, "It's this. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and then your neighbor as yourself." When, therefore, we become sinful—or when we are sinners—it involves not simply something we do to somebody else. It involves the resolution we had with God.

When we're out of touch with God, I've found it's even difficult to speak the name of God. I called on a man this week in the hospital who's not a believer. I began to ask him (he had had a heart attack) about his relationship with God. He replied something to the effect, "I think I'm going to make it ok. I don't know about the Man Upstairs, but I'm prepared for whatever comes. Let it come." It was striking to me that he could not bring himself to even say the name God. But "the Man Upstairs" had to be substituted. This shows an estrangement from God where it's difficult even to speak of Him, so "sinners" is not a term just referring to violent people who are out with knives terrorizing. But it describes all of humanity.

All of us, therefore, are in Adam or in Christ. So that when Christ died on the cross, when I believe in Him, I am there experiencing death. I don't experience it. He experiences it. I am in Him in that sense. Even as Levi was in Abraham's loins, even as I was once within Adam's genetic potential, so now in the spiritual sphere I am in Christ. When He on Easter morning splits the tomb and comes from it, I am raised up with Him. In actual fact, I have not yet been raised from the dead. I have not yet died. But my resurrection is so certain that the apostle can speak of the Christian's resurrection as occurring in the past tense. Because our fate is bound up with the fate of Jesus Christ. Therefore, since He is raised, we are already raised. And not only that, we are seated with Him in the heavenly places. That's where He is—at the right hand of the Father,

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where He enjoys preeminence and power and authority. So already I'm there. I start my Christian life by understanding that's how high I've risen—way beyond the position begun through Adam. I am in Christ, that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

So Paul closes this section on justification by showing us that we belong to one or the other: to Adam or to Christ. If we truly have understood the nature of justification, we have, therefore, understood that it is not our work at all. It is not anything that we have done in being declared righteous before God. Christ has simply offered us a free gift. We have responded by receiving the free gift.

When at Christmas time you receive a gift, beautifully-wrapped, which is given to you in love, you can choose if you're hardened to say, "I don't want to see the gift. Get it out of here." I don't know too many of you that do that. Or you can take the gift and open it and take it and use it. This is God's free gift to us, the free gift of grace in Christ Jesus—a gift not to be spurned, but to be received through faith. For it is in receiving that gift we are given life.

A gospel hymn writer put it all together really well when he said something like this, "Once I was clothed in the rags of my sin, wretched and poor, lost and lonely within. But the King of all Kings, in love, took me in. And now, praise God, I'm a child of the King. Oh, yes! I'm a child of the King. His royal blood now flows in my veins, and I who was wretched and poor now can sing, 'Praise God, praise God, I'm a child of the king.'"

We are given life.

Closing Prayer

As we pray today, Lord, I think of the words of Charles Wesley, where he exalted in You in His Christmas carol. That he was praying to you, through that song, that the image of Adam would be blotted out, and that Your image would be in its place. I think also, as I pray, of Saint Paul's

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words, which tell us, as believers, just as we bore the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the Man of Heaven. We exalt in that today. Through the physical eyes which we have, we can indeed see that we bear the image of the man of dust. But through spiritual eyes—as look in faith to what Jesus our Lord has done in His life, His death and His resurrection—we see that there is a new nature dwelling within us, a nature of the Son of God. We bear, and shall bear, the image of that nature now and for eternity. We praise You for the free gift of grace which has abounded for us. We pray, Lord Jesus, to You, the head of the new humanity. We pray to You with love and joy in our hearts, for You have done for us what we could never do for ourselves. And You, Lord Jesus, who seek to draw us to the Father, are here again today through the presence of the Spirit, saying to us that You're willing and able and ready to let the light shine into the darkness of all of our hearts. So that Your nature would be implanted and ingrafted into us and we would be the sons and the daughters of God. We praise You for the precious promises of Your Word, and for the hope of life we now have in You through Christ our Lord. Amen.