

The Gospel as it Really Is:
Romans simply Explained
Jesus gives much more than Adam took away!
Romans 5:12-21
June 1st 2025 MHC & MPC
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At around 11.15 am, Sunday 3rd September 1939, Neville Chamberlain told the nation by radio “this country is at war with Germany.” And from that moment every single person living in the UK—England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—was at war with Germany. One man made a declaration and millions were affected, whether they wanted to be at war or not, whether they even agreed to be at war or not. One man’s actions affected the whole population.

We call this the “federal head” principle. Prime Minister Chamberlain was the “Federal Head,” and what he said affected the lives of millions. It’s not an unusual principle. Though we see “Federal Headship” writ large in wartime, we observe it working all the time at much smaller levels, such as in the family for example: a husband or wife spends recklessly and the whole family is plunged into poverty.

This principle, the “federal head principle” is the key that unlocks Romans chapter 5 verses 12-21, before us this morning.

We’re making our way through Paul’s letter to the Romans:

- Paul has explained mankind’s *problem*—our sin (2 and a half chapters!)
- He has outlined God’s *amazing remedy* for sin —the gift of righteousness (earned by Jesus Christ through his sufferings on the cross) given freely to everyone who will believe (1 and a half chapters)
- He’s explained (last week, first half of chapter 5) that this free gift is *just the first of many other blessings* God pours out freely upon his children, through Christ Jesus:
 - We have peace with God, he is, friend!
 - We possess the hope of heaven!
 - And the knowledge that God loves us!
 - Plus a new understanding of our trials that enables us to rejoice in suffering!
 - Plus complete security in this life and the next!

As another apostle puts it: “*from the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.*” (John 1:16)

Christians are blessed people! I’m referring to the higher and greater spiritual blessings of our lives. We may be unwell, we may be weary, we may be poor, our daily lives may be blighted with many sorrows, but if we have faith in Christ we are spiritual billionaires, who can shout, every day:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” (Ephesians 1:3)

But Paul is aware that someone will be asking, as his letter is read out in the churches of Rome—and Malvern or Worcester, “How can these spiritual blessings be given to everyone *through one person*?” “How can one person, Jesus Christ, bless untold multitudes? What’s the mechanism, what’s the means of this widespread blessing?

And that gives Paul the opportunity to explain the principle of “federal head:” one man acts, many are affected by his actions. So today,

1. There’s a truth we must understand—federal headship
2. A contrast we must grasp—Jesus is different from Adam
3. A salvation to rejoice in—Jesus gives us more than Adam lost.

A truth we must understand—federal headship

I must tell you that when I first read and meditated on these verses early this week, I found it hard to understand! Perhaps you felt that when Romans 5 was read a moment ago. That is why God has given the gift of teaching and preaching to the church. Have you ever wondered why churches have full-time pastors, like myself, and like Peter and Nathan are training to become? One of the main reasons is that it takes many hours to understand the Bible properly and prepare sermons which explain the truth simply. What do we pastors do during the week? We’re often in our studies, prayerfully labouring, sometimes wrestling, to both understand it ourselves and then to explain it to the congregation.

But with the Lord’s help the fog began to lift and the meaning of these verses became clear. Paul shows us that two men in the history of the world were “federal heads” in a really big, global way.

The first was Adam, the second was Jesus Christ. Both these men did something which affected millions and millions of other people.

The summary of the whole chapter is verse 18:

“Consequently, just as one trespass (that is Adam’s disobedience—eating the fruit he was told not to eat) resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act (Jesus’ willing act of suffering for our sins) resulted in justification and life for all people.”

And this is how the salvation that *one man* Jesus earned on the cross can be given to *everyone* who believes. Jesus is the federal head of everyone who believes, so his actions, his salvation, flows to them all!

But we must first understand how Adam has affected us, because he too is a federal head: in fact, Adam is the federal head of *all* mankind.

We need to talk about Adam.

According to the Bible, Adam was a historical figure, a real human being, from whom we are all descended. (BTW: If the relationship between the Bible and science concerns you, there's a talk on God and Science coming up in two weeks time, Sunday evening here, which I think you'll find helpful.) Adam was given just one command, you may remember this from Genesis chapter 2.

"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." (2:16-17)

Led astray by the serpent, refusing to stand up to Eve, Adam ate the forbidden fruit and from that very moment—this is what you and I must understand—something happened to Adam which affected all of his descendants.

Adam's very nature changed—he became a sinner, he suddenly found himself predisposed to do wrong, wanting to do wrong! And one day he died. And here's Paul's point, because he is our federal head, his sinful nature and death was passed down to all his descendants, verse 11:

"sin entered the world through one man (Adam), and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—" (verse 11)

So Adam became a sinner and consequently Adam died. And because Adam is our federal head, every human being also became a sinner and is therefore destined to die.

(Another BTW: according to the Bible, Death is not natural, God did not create human beings to die, death, our last enemy, is the direct consequence of Adam's sin.)

If you are a parent you will have ample—daily? - proof of Adam's sin. Why does the sweetest child do wrong? Why don't you have to teach a child to lie or steal or hurt their sibling, or disobey a parent? Because they are born into this world as sinners, how did king David put it, "surely I was sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51:5)

Two of the saddest tunes ever written are Gorecki's "Sorrowful songs" and Samuel Barber's "Adagio for strings." No music could plumb the depths of ruin Adam brought upon mankind by one sin!

And the law has made everything worse!

And the giving of the ten commandments, through Moses on Mount Sinai, made the universal human situation worse for two reasons:

1) the commands revealed the scope and breadth of our sin

The ten commandments revealed just how sinful human beings had become! From Adam to Moses, people sinned, they were born with a God-given conscience, (Paul told us that in chapter 2) they knew it was wrong to steal and hurt others, yet they still did those things; but when the ten commandments were given they brought to light a whole bunch of *other* sins, which people didn't know were wrong! Even Paul, he writes this in 7:7, did not realise coveting what other people have was wrong until he read the tenth commandment! "Oh no, that's another wrong thing I have been doing!"

The ten commandments exposed the true depths of the human condition! In fact that was one of the reasons the 10 commandments were given, v 20, *"the law was added to that trespass **might increase.**"*

2) the commands actually stir up sin! The other reason the ten commandments made the human situation worse is that it stirred up perversity in sinful nature to do *the very things* they should not do! (We'll see more of that in chapter 7.) It's the reason the old lady objected to the ten commandments being read out in church, because, she said, "they put so many ideas into peoples' minds!!

Just as Neville Chamberlain declared war and we all found ourselves at war, so Adam, our federal head, sinned and died, and thus we also became sinners, subject to the reign of death!

But here's the good news! Adam is not our *only* federal head! If we believe in Jesus Christ, he becomes our new federal head! And you could not find two federal heads *more different* than Adam and Jesus! *"Consequently, just as one trespass (that is Adam's disobedience) resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act (Jesus' sacrifice) resulted in justification and life for all people."* (Paul means *"all who believe"* not absolutely everyone, because that's what he has been teaching thus far, salvation is by faith, but it's open to all people in the world)

A contrast we must grasp—Jesus is so so different from Adam!

Jesus is not like Adam, "The gift is not like the trespass", because while they are both federal heads, the similarity ends there! He's more contrasting than comparing. Paul wants to press home the enormous contrast between Adam and Jesus!

- Adam brought sin and judgement and condemnation and death to everyone connected with him by his one act of disobedience!
- But Jesus brings gifts and grace and justification and righteousness and eternal life to everyone, to millions, to billions who are connected to him by faith, by his one act of sacrificial loving obedience!

This is why Christians worship only one man, the Lord Jesus Christ. During lockdown I came across a new song which now ranks among my favourite Christian songs, "Is he worthy?" by Andrew Peterson. It's based on John's visionary sadness that no-one could be found to open the scrolls and

reveal God's future plans, Revelation 5. But one of the elders tells John that he's found someone who is worthy. The Worthy One is Jesus whose death purchased people "from every tribe and language and people." (5:9)

*Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
Of all blessing and honour and glory
Is He worthy of this? He is*

We worship Jesus, the second Adam, because through this one man, this God-man, people from across the world can have righteousness and eternal life.

What should we take home from Romans 5:12-21?

We've learnt that *God works by the principle of federal headship*. One person represents many. And if you say "that's unfair! How come I am a sinner because Adam sinned way back then?" then let me (1) ask, if you had been Adam, perhaps you would have eaten the forbidden fruit? And may I say, (2) salvation, works by *the same* federal principle! One man obeys, a multitude are given eternal life. You can't have it both ways!

We've learnt that *Adam is our federal head, simply because we are his descendants*, whether we like it or not. We've inherited our sinful tendency and the reign of death from him. Doesn't that explain so much going on in the world today? The big world "out there" and all the little relational worlds of family, neighbours, schools and workplaces we each inhabit from week to week? We see sin and death all around us, and indeed if we are honest, sometimes within us.

We have learnt that *if we believe in Jesus Christ*, we have another federal head through whose actions we can be made righteous and receive eternal life. I ask you: Has Jesus Christ become your federal head? Do you believe in Him? The all-glorious Son of God, who came to earth in the human person of Jesus to suffer and die for your sins? So that you can be righteous in God's eyes and enjoy eternal life? If not, why not? And why not today?

And one more thing we learn, and with this I close, in Christ Jesus we gain more than we lost in Adam.

A salvation to rejoice in – Jesus gives us more than Adam lost!

Adam lived in a perfect world, a beautiful garden without suffering, death or sorrow, war or need. He—and we - lost all of that through his one act of disobedience. But God is in the business of outdoing Satan's losses, here is God's grand principle, v 20: "*where sin increased, grace increased all the more*," (verse 20) God always outdoes Satan! Satan gives us a pound of sorrows, God gives us a mountain of blessing. And that means that the heaven that awaits us will be more glorious than the garden Adam left! Isaac Watts understood this and included these two lines in his hymn, "Jesus shall reign wherever the sun does its successive journeys run."

*In Him the tribes of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost.*

Through Jesus Christ, our federal head, you and I who believe in him, have before us a unspeakably glorious inheritance.

But it's not here yet! It lies ahead of us! We are called to live in hope and wait patiently for eternal life, trusting and obeying him day by day in this short transient life.