



Sermon Notes | Death and Life: Part I | Romans 5:12-21

## **INTRODUCTION**

Through today's Scripture passage we will see the reality that we are all humans, but that we do not share the same **humanity**. There are two kinds of humanity, the humanity of death, and the humanity of life. That's it! Stated another way, there is 'the way of life' and 'the way of death'. This is helpful because it points to the terminus of these two **humanities**. All humans walk this earthly realm, and we will look at this walk more closely in chapter 6, but it is not only the manner of the walk, it is also where the path we are on leads to, and where the path ends. After this earthly sojourn, after our temporary existence, after our death, where ultimately do we spend eternity? Do we live or die? These are **humanity's** questions. We want to know. And it is our very **humanity** that defines and determines our ultimate cosmic position. Our present **humanity** determines the answer to that question.

How do we spend eternity? Do we die eternally separated from God as we deserve to be, or do we live eternally spending forever in God's presence, not as we deserve to be? How do we know which **humanity** defines us? Which group am I part of? It is a key question, and it is vital to know which is your **humanity**.

The answer to the question is, Who is your head? Who is your representative? Who stands for you on that day? **Humanity** is defined by who our '**head**' is. It is one of two '**heads**'. The first of the two '**heads**' is Adam, who is defined by 'rebellion'. Adam is your '**head**' if you follow him similarly in 'rebellion', if God's commands are not your joy, but are rather your doubt, your question, your attack. Or, there is the second '**head**', the '**Living Head**', the better '**head**', the better Adam, that being, Jesus Christ and His '**Humanity**', which is defined by submission to God, obedience to God, not leaning on your own understanding, but trusting God for life. These are the two '**heads**'. There are no others. One represents DEATH; the other represents LIFE. Which one are you? This very day you are part of one of them, one and only one. You are either part of 'death', or you are part of 'life', not both, only one. Knowing which you are is fundamental to your understanding.

Our study in the letter to the Romans about '**the gospel of God**', what it is, how it was delivered, why it is needed, why it is important, brings us to this key point of importance. It is the basis, the groundwork, for what we are learning. '**The gospel of God**' centers here, because our default as humans rests here on one of these two 'humanities',

and contrary to many today, it is not the '**humanity of life**'. This letter tells us the opposite is true, as chapters 1-3 have already shown us. '**Naturally**' we are card-carrying members of death's '**humanity**'. Our default is to this position of '**humanity of death**' but it need not be our final position. We can receive a new '**humanity**', a new '**humanity**' under a new '**head**', a '**living head**', not characterized by sin and death. Thanks be to God that we can receive membership in a new '**humanity**'. We can have a new '**head**' in Jesus Christ, and a new life, and can live an abundant life. This reality, death in Adam in contrast to life in Christ, as displayed in '**the gospel of God**', is what we will see in the '**gospel**' today.

Romans 5:12-21

*"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 — for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 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. 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. 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. 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. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

So, 'death and life' ... This entire passage weaves that contrast through Adam and Christ. Beginning there, let us consider 'Adam and the '**humanity of death**'.

### **I. DEATH'S ARRIVAL: (vs 12)**

Romans 5:12

*"Therefore, just as sin came into world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned —"*

This verse is bursting with truth. So much is here. Paul begins by introducing a big theological thought, but then, as was a custom with Paul (as seen in Ephesians and Romans), he then pauses midstream to explain/introduce another thought, and begins a new trail at the end of verse 12, a hanging cutoff, indicated by the long dash. He will come back to his initial theology point in verse 12 eventually, but first he wants to demonstrate an important contrast here between life and death. He points out the parts of the contrast:

Verse 15: Trespass and Free gift.

Verse 17: Reign of Death and Reign of Life.

Verse 18: Condemnation and Justification.

Verse 19: Disobedience and Obedience.

Verse 20: Sin and Grace.

Verse 21: Death in Adam and Life through Christ.

This verse 21 completes the contrast, is the contrast of this passage, so that even though Paul paused in verse 12, we can still track through reading the passage through to verse 21.

To paraphrase verses 12-21, we capture Paul's main idea with his use of a number of synonyms and terms:

Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all man because all sinned, so too did grace come into the world through one man and life through grace, and life spread to all because through that one man, Jesus Christ, all are righteous.

And so we see the contrast of two men, and two **'heads'**. And Paul makes clear his idea by contrasting death to life.

Paul begins by looking at verse 12, DEATH'S ARRIVAL, sin coming into the world, through one man. This was **'entry'**. His purpose is 'big picture' now. There is no Jew and Gentile talk here. He goes back to the beginning, to one man, the 'first' man Adam, whose name means man/human, 'first created human', to the beginning of **'humanity'**. Adam, the first, stood before all. It is he, Adam, who introduces something. Sin enters the world. Sin is in the world because Adam brought it into the world.

Now, you might question, 'Was it not Eve? Did not Eve sin first?' And yes, she did. But it is Adam that God seeks out. It is Adam that God calls to. It is Adam that is held to account for their sin.

Genesis 3:9

*"But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'"*

We note, however, that Eve is not off the hook. She will be indicted.

Genesis 3:13

*"Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'"*

However, God went to Adam first. It is Adam who is accountable. It reveals that Adam is on the hook 'first' due to his **'headship'**. Adam is **'head'**. Principally, Adam represents **'humanity'**, both men and women, because he was the 'first' to be created, the 'first' to represent the human race. This is **'representation'** theology. We know about this **'representation'** concept: in sports, the 'coach' **'represents'** the players, in business the 'CEO' **'represents'** the employer. They are the **'representative heads'** of specific groups. When things go wrong, it is the CEO and the coach who lose their jobs. Yes, 'consequences'

are faced by all involved, but there is greater '**accountability**' for the '**representative heads**', a corporate/collective accounting.

This same principle exists as a framework for marriage, as noted in Ephesians. The 'husband' is the '**head**' of the wife. It is also seen in the relationship between Christ and the Church, Christ and His Body. This is '**headship**' and '**representation**', a particular standing, 'one for all'. (More will be said about Christ's '**headship**' in the days ahead.)

Ephesians 5:22-24

*"Wives, submit to your own husband, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."*

Adam is '**head**', being that he was the first human. He '**represents**' all humanity who come after him. This is his '**representation**'. It was his rule, his reign, and therefore he is 'responsible' for the sin that entered the world. He not only is responsible for **sin**, that 'sin that came into the world through one man' (verse 12), but he is also responsible for **death**, for sin brought death as well.

But sadly, sin does not turn heads. We live and tolerate sin. Yes, sin exists, says the unbeliever, but we will just try to ignore it, will try to stay away from it, will try to avoid it. Just dodge sin, don't acknowledge it, don't touch it. Just stay out of trouble and add good, it has been said. But sin is not just an unpleasant reality. Sin is not benign. Sin has reach. Sin has tentacles. And sin 'leads to death'. Sin is unavoidable. Sin cannot be ignored.

Romans 6:23

*"For the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Sin in Adam leads to death. There is no detached sin. There is no benign sin. And sin has effect. We see evidence of this from Achan's story. Achan's sin was not detached. His sin had effect on all around him. Because Achan disobeyed God and kept back some of the spoil, God was angry with the whole of the covenant community, and due to this corporate guilt, Israel was defeated in battle for the first time. Joshua becomes most distressed thinking God has forgotten His promise of deliverance. But God calls Joshua to face what has happened. As a corporate community they dealt with the sin, and Achan's sin caused he and his family to face death.

Joshua 7:1, 10-13, 15-16, 18-25

*"But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel. ... The LORD said to Joshua, 'Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings. Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their*

*enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become 'devoted for destruction'. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you. Get up! Consecrate the people and say, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says the LORD, God of Israel. 'There are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you.' ... And he who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done an outrageous thing in Israel. So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel near tribe by tribe, and the tribe of Judah was taken. And he brought near the clans of Judah, and the clan of the Zerahites was taken. And he brought near his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. Then Joshua said to Achan, 'My son, give glory to the LORD God of Israel and give praise to him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.' And Achan answered Joshua, 'Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath.' So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the people of Israel. And they laid them down before the LORD. And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had. And they brought them up to the Valley of Achor. And Joshua said, 'Why did you bring trouble on us?' And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones."*

Contaminated food brought into the house is not just a matter of food 'tasting funny'. Contaminated food leads to sickness. They are connected. Soon the 'funny taste' will lead to the 'sick body'. In the same way, sin leads to death. Every time sin leads to death. It is a serious matter. Sin is inseparable from death. Ananias and Sapphira demonstrate this powerfully in the early church.

#### Acts 5:1-11

*"But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but 'to God.' When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. And after an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, 'Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.' And she said, 'Yes, for so much.' But Peter said to her, 'How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will*

*carry you out.' Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dad, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things."*

In the Beginning, there was a command from God. Adam had God's permission to eat from the many trees, except for one. God warned Adam that to eat of this 'one' tree would result in death.

Genesis 2:8-9,15-17

*"And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ... The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'"*

The LORD was speaking of a 'physical' death, but also of a 'spiritual' matter. 'Spiritual death' leads to 'physical death'. Adam would die. From that day, Adam is **'spiritually dead'**. His soul is dead. Therefore, he will also eventually die physically as well. From this point, Adam, you will start the process of dying; you will begin to die from this time on.

Genesis 2:17b

*"... for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*

We die because our soul has died in Adam, therefore we inherit sin and death through Adam.

Romans 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 ----."*

Yes, we are 'practical sinners', meaning that we are sinners by practice. It is true. But is this truth taught here in this verse 12? Consider the context of the verse. The context of this Romans' passage is not about us and what we are doing. No. The passage is about Adam and Christ. The context then is about their practice, not ours. And it is not just a passage about two men. It is the 'contrast' of two '**heads**' who '**represent**' mankind: Adam '**representing**' for all, and Christ '**representing**' for all. 'Death spread to all men because all sinned in Adam. It is not that we are guilty of committing the sin 'with' Adam. We do not have responsibility for that 'tree violation', but we are all 'in Adam' from that garden time. Adam, the first of '**humanity**', stood as our '**representative**', and because Adam faced the sin, therefore his actions had corporate effect, and his actions had corporate consequences. 'All sinned in Adam' and death spread to all mankind. All humanity is in him. Adam's sin was their sin, and our sin. Adam '**represented**' the '**head**' of humanity. Adam sinned, not only

as a man, but also as mankind, therefore every man shares in the act of being in the garden, and in the guilt of that garden sin.

Returning to Paul's words in verse 18, we read, "... one trespass led to condemnation for all men" (Romans 5:18), meaning by condemnation, guilt for all men. It was **'inherited guilt'**. And again we must pause, for it sounds like today, when we hear people talk about "generational sin". What they are espousing and what this verse is teaching are not the same at all.

1. Adam was a 'federal head'. He was the **'representative head'** with the command given to him. Adam stood for all of humanity, which is not the case of our grandparents. In Ezekiel 18:4, the LORD says "the soul who sins shall die." ESV That passage teaches on 'personal' responsibility, which is very different to 'corporate' representation -- which was only true of Adam and Christ.
2. Adam was a **'representative head'**. Yes, wrong was done, but we are not 'the heads', and we are powerless to fix it. In Adam, we acknowledge the wrong done, we face the consequences for the wrong done, but we cannot fix it or make it right.

Therefore, we rejoice in Christ Jesus, who came, and who could fix it, who had the power to make it right again. Only a **'corporate head'** can fix these **'representative'** problems. (This is why they get a 'new coach'.)

**'Representation'** is not the only way that sin is spread through to mankind, but it is the main way. How else? We refer back to Romans 5 and find other consequences.

Romans 5:13-14

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

In **'original sin'**, sin transformed Adam's inner nature. Genetic mutation was passed on, a corruption in the body and the soul. This is new, and therefore mankind becomes **'sinners'** in nature as well as in practice.

This explains why David states that man is brought forth in decay and corruption, and that wicked man is estranged from birth.

Psalm 51:5

*"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."*

Psalm 58:3

*"The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies."*

And this is why Jesus declares that man must be **'born again'**.

John 3:3

*"Jesus answered him [Nicodemus], 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'"*

By default, humans are not Kingdom bound. The natural birth will not do.

Through one man, all sin. Through Adam, sin and death reign over all. In Adam all sinned. Paul gives proof that this was a matter of '**representation**' not practice.

## **II. DEATH'S REIGN: (vv. 13-14)**

Romans 5:13-14

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

Verses 13-14 are connected to verse 12. The word 'for' which starts verse 13, signals a connection.

Paul teaches here in Romans 5 that '**death's reign**' is a '**headship**' issue. Are not all men 'sinners' by practice? Yes, but while true, this is not the point here. This is '**original sin**'. This is '**original death**'. How does Paul prove his point? He takes us to a time of 'revealed sin' that is not on the scene yet, yet there is evidence of sin 'reigning'. In the time from Adam to Moses, '**death reigned**' even before 'the Law' was given, even though their sin was not like Adam's '**original sin**'. That is, there was no express command from God to the people not to sin like 'like this'. There was no revelation of sin by any specific law as it came to Adam, that is, there was no further, 'Don't do this!', as had been given to Adam.

Genesis 2:16-17

*"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'"*

This was clear '**law revealed**' at that time, 'one law' given by God, to Adam. But after that revelation of law, there was no 'further law' revealed. (That Law, the Mosaic Law, was yet to come, years later, in Exodus 20, along with the concept of a 'living standard' that was introduced to the people in Exodus 19:5. But up till then, there was no 'law' and no 'administration'.) Adam's violation was against the '**revealed law**' of those early garden days, as stated in Genesis 2.

Paul states that sin was indeed in the world before God revealed the Exodus Laws, but that sin was not counted in the same way, 'like that', against a particular law between these two times of 'revelation'. Between the '**revealing**' of the two '**Law**' expressions, the Eden Law and the Exodus Laws, sin was present, but it was not a specific response, not a violation against a specific God expressed law, as Adam's transgression had been. And so sin



was not counted the same way for the people after Adam as it had been for Adam. Sin still had consequence after Adam, but it could not be counted against **'humanity'** in the same way because the people had not received new law yet.

Later, in the days of Joshua, the newly **'revealed law'** was now in place. Joshua reminds the people to live according to all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, as he himself had been challenged to do.

Joshua 23:6-8, 16

*"Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day. ... if you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them. Then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land that he has given to you."*

Joshua calls the people to choose who they will serve, to put away the false gods and to serve God faithfully. This is a serious matter, not one to take casually.

Joshua 24:19-20

*"But Joshua said to the people, 'You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.'"*

There are **'sins'** and there are **'transgressions'**. There is a difference between **'sin'** and **'transgression'**. A **'sin'** is a falling short of God's standard, whereas a **'transgression'** is an action of treason against a Word from the LORD. **'Sin'** versus **'transgression'**: a representation with sin.

Romans 7:7

*"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'."*

Adam **'transgressed'** the **'law revealed'**. God commanded, and Adam broke that express command, thus this was a **'transgression'**.

Then there was **'sin'** without **'law'**, and there was **'sin'** with some knowledge of the **'law'**. We know about this in our daily lives. It still is 'sin' even though you don't know the 'law'. You are pulled over on the road, for example, and you explain that you did not know the speed limit. You start a new job and do something wrong, and you make the excuse that you didn't know that there was a company policy. You are travelling in a new country, and you don't know the expected customs. Yet still you are 'guilty' of doing wrong.

But '**transgression**' is different. Adam was given an express '**law**' and command, and he chose to act against it, 'I will not do it!' And the '**sin**' was counted against him. All subsequent '**sin**' was different from that of Adam's, but those people from Adam to Moses still 'died' because '**death reigned**' still, even without the '**Law**'. They had 'inherited' the '**guilt of Adam**'; they 'died' because they were already bound 'to die' because '**sin**' was already in place in Adam. Yes, they sinned in practice. Yes, they sinned in Adam. And yes, they died. There is 'no hope' in this '**humanity of death**'. Sin is in the world, and you cannot stop '**sin**'. It is here. It is in the DNA.

If left there, there would be 'no hope' at all for '**humanity**', but there is another '**humanity**'.

Romans 5:14b

*"... Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come."*

But 'Adam was a type'. He had a form, a pattern, of another who was yet to come. He would be like Adam in '**representation**' because He would also stand as its '**head**', '**head**' of a community, like Adam. But He would not be like Adam in His being, His actions, or His death. His **one action** affects His '**humanity group**' and His **one action** brings on a '**new humanity**'. Jesus Christ is the '**new humanity**'. He is the Promised Seed through Adam, like Adam, but different.

Genesis 3:15

*"I will put enmity between you and woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."*

The promised new '**head**' embedded in the curse, is the new promise of a new '**head**'. A new and better Adam, and a 'new hope' for '**humanity**'.