

Original Sin and Original Grace

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 12th of August 2001. The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled Original Sin and Original Grace and is from Romans chapter 5 verses 12 to 21.

And the passage from Romans 5 is on page 917 in the Bibles in front of you and I think you'll benefit from having it open in front of you if possible.

Romans chapter 5 verse 12 to 21. Some of my favourite TV advertisements are those produced by AAMI.

Where a little driving error wreaks enormous havoc as one person does a mistake with their car and that creates an accident where somebody swerves off the road and runs into a house or a tree or a boat gets collapsed or even the car that comes out of a florist shop.

I think there's such creativity and so much fun seeing such havoc wreaked by one little accident. But I wonder how long it would take to clean it all up at the end. One little mistake easy to make and an enormous clean up job that is much harder to do than the initial mistake.

[1 : 2 8] See cleaning up a mess often takes much more time and effort than creating it in the first place. It's easy to just bump over a glass of red wine as I did a week or two ago.

Much harder to clean it up. Get it all out of and clean up the stains. I guess it's easy to flick a burning match into a house and set a house on fire. It's much harder to put it out or even to rebuild the house if it burns down.

It's the same with a virus or an infection. Very easy to spread. Much harder to stop. I guess at some point, 20 or so years ago, the AIDS virus somehow entered into human life through perhaps one odd but simple act.

Almost impossible now, after all these years, to eradicate it. And it's the same with sin. So simply act, so hard the undoing. The first man, Adam, and his wife Eve were the first sinners.

They took a forbidden piece of fruit in the Garden of Eden. There were plenty of trees. There was plenty of option, plenty of fruit for them to take. But denying God, distrusting his word, being tempted by the serpent, they took a piece of fruit from the tree that was prohibited to them.

[2 : 4 3] A very simple act. Very easy to do. We might even think fairly inconsequential. But what universal ramifications from that one act of taking the forbidden fruit.

Immediately, Adam and his wife Eve hid from God. Because sin divides and separates. He blamed the woman for it. Because sin divides and separates.

The consequences were vast from that one simple act of eating the fruit. Even somehow within Adam and Eve, they knew that something was wrong. They hid from God.

They blamed each other. God's human relationships were distorted. Inter-human relationships were distorted as well. But it didn't stop there either.

It's not as though with their children, they could start afresh in a perfect way. No, the picture of their children, Cain, one of their sons, killing another son, Abel, is not that they start from a perfect place, but rather that they're already dominated by the reign and rule of sin.

[3 : 52] So God can't even talk Cain out of killing his brother. So much grip had sin taken on Cain that he killed his brother. A far worse act than taking fruit from a tree.

Because sin has spread. It's taken grip. It's taken hold. It's ruling and it's dominating. And it doesn't stop there. Because Genesis chapter 4 goes on to tell us the descendants of Adam's son, Cain.

And sin continues at each generation, getting worse and worse, so much so that a man boasts in the murder that he commits a few generations after Cain. And a bit beyond that, humanity is thoroughly evil in its hearts and in its thoughts.

Sin has entered the world through a very simple act of Adam and Eve in a garden, picking a bit of fruit that they were forbidden to do. They distrusted God's word. They disobeyed God's word.

But the ramifications of that were enormous. As sin spread from person to person, generation to generation, taking root, taking hold, getting worse, and being impossible to overthrow.

[4 : 58] And the result? Death. God said to Adam and Eve, If you eat of this fruit, you will surely die. And though perhaps many years later, the truth of those words came out, Adam died.

Eve died. Cain died. His children died. Adam and Eve's other children died. And their children died. And they all died eventually.

Even Methuselah, who lived to be 969 years old, who many people may have thought, well, maybe this man's going to live forever. Even he died. Because death reigned.

Death ruled. Through this little act of sin that came into the world through Adam and Eve as it spread and took hold, God's punishment for sin was evident for all.

All died. Maybe we could say that human nature was somehow corrupted by Adam's sin.

[6 : 02] Maybe we could say that all humans have inherited a flawed human nature. Human nature that has perhaps little specks or remnants of the glory of God in it and the image of God, but nonetheless flawed or corrupted through the influence of sin so that human nature, as it's inherited from person to person, is fallen, sinful, flawed human nature.

We might be tempted to blame Adam. I mean, it's his fault. Notice how in this passage later on, it's Adam who gets the blame, not Eve, indeed. But we all sin and we're all to blame.

None of us honors God as God. None of us, all of us fall short of the glory of God. We've all exchanged the glory of God for idols and lies, as we've seen in recent weeks, and we're all to blame for our own sin.

And like Adam, we all will die. It's a bit scary when you inherit family traits. I look like my father. My sister looks like my mother.

We can't work out who my other sister looks like. It's even more scary when it's character traits. The temper of one parent, inherited by one child.

[7 : 14] I won't say any more. And other sorts of ways of relating or speaking can be fairly scary. Caleb Trask was a twin.

His mother was a murderer and a whore. His brother, his twin brother, Aaron, was favoured by the father. He was certainly a good and noble person. Caleb lived with the struggle of having his mother's blood.

It was the thing that he often expressed, his fear, his anxiety that he had his mother's blood, and therefore he was caught up in the sorts of evil personality and character of his mother, the murderous, and the whore.

He was a man with few, if any, friends. A man who plotted revenge. A man who was jealous for the favour extended to his brother, Aaron. The family servant, the Chinese family servant, challenged him.

You can conquer this evil blood in you. You can conquer this sinful tendency and trait in you, he said. But Caleb didn't and couldn't.

[8 : 21] The words of the Chinese servant are not really correct. The story is East of Eden by John Steinbeck. It's a reflection about the fallen nature of humanity. It's a bit more positive than I think the Bible is.

John Steinbeck, I think, thinks that people somehow might be able to shake off that sort of inherent evil. But the Bible's view is that we can't. We have all inherited a sinful nature from Adam.

We enter our world spiritually dead. Death has dominion over us. One day physically we will die, but through sin there is spiritual separation from God that physical death merely confirms for eternity.

And we cannot break out of that mould ourselves. We cannot shake off that fallen, sinful, human nature that we have been born into and inherited. Death exercises a dominion that we cannot escape.

Even where there's no law from God, sin exists. Sin is not only, you see, breaking a law of God, a commandment of God. There was a time before God had given his law to Moses, hundreds of years in fact going back to Adam, where God had not given his laws to anyone.

[9 : 40] And yet that didn't mean there was no sin, that the world was perfect. You don't need a law of God for there to be sin. Indeed, law is like a diagnosis. Hundreds of years ago people had cancer, but they may not have known what it was.

But now in more recent times we have a diagnosis that tells us what is wrong, in many cases with people. But the illness was there before the diagnosis. The diagnosis merely confirms the existing illness.

And so it is with God's law. When God gave his law to Moses, it clarified God's commandments, but it merely identified sin that was already existing in humanity.

So even before Moses in the Old Testament, in the hundreds of years between Adam, the first person, and Moses, there was sin. That's Paul's argument at the beginning of this section of Romans chapter 5.

Verse 12 begins, Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, that is, through Adam, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all, because after all, all have sinned, sin was indeed in the world before the law.

[10 : 50] But sin is not reckoned where there is no law. That is, you can't actually identify or count it up. Even though it's there, sin is not listed as a little transgression if there's no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam.

A typical exam question at theological college is to compare and contrast things. Compare and contrast Jeremiah and Isaiah, two of the prophets in the Old Testament.

Compare and contrast Mark's gospel with Luke's gospel, or John or Matthew. Compare and contrast Calvin and Luther, two of the great reformers. Compare and contrast Christianity in different countries, and so on.

In the verses that follow, Paul compares and contrasts Jesus and Adam, the first person. He begins with a set of contrasts, and then he goes to the likenesses, the similarities.

In verses 15, 16, and 17, he makes three points about contrast between Jesus and Adam. In verse 15, firstly, he contrasts their actions.

[12 : 01] The free gift is not like the trespass. They're the actions. Jesus offers a free gift. Adam's action is to trespass, to break the law of God. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, that is, through Adam's sin, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.

Adam sins. Jesus offers a free gift of grace. You cannot be more poles apart than the two actions of the people. Adam's sin leads to death for many. Jesus' free gift of grace abounds for many.

But their actions are vastly different. In verse 16, Paul contrasts the result of their actions. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin.

For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. That is, being declared righteous, as we've seen in recent weeks.

And again, you cannot be more poles apart in the effects of the actions. Adam's sin, the sin of one man, Adam, leads to condemnation, judgment of God against sinners.

[13 : 15] But on the other hand, at the other extreme, Jesus' free gift of grace means rather than condemnation, its opposite is true. Justification, being declared righteous by God, acquitted for our sin, not condemned for it.

And then thirdly, the contrast is between the dominions that each produced, the rule or reign or power, if you like. If because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus.

From Adam's sin, death reigns, death rules, death supreme, in the end. But through the work of Jesus, the opposite, well, sort of the opposite is true.

We might expect Paul to say, Adam's sin led to death reigning, Jesus' work leads to life reigning, but actually what he says about the effect of Jesus is not that life reigns, but that believers reign in life.

What this is showing us is a restoration from God's original purpose. because originally when God made humanity, in the very first chapter of the Bible, Genesis chapter 1, he made humanity to exercise dominion over the world that God had made.

[14 : 40] But that was a dominion that was distorted by sin. Death now reigned, not human beings in the image of God. Jesus' work is to restore God's original purpose so that now believers will have dominion as they were intended to do in the first place.

That is the effect of Jesus' work as described in verse 17. So Paul has contrasted Jesus and Adam. They're poles apart. One sins, one's righteous. One leads to condemnation, one leads to declaration of righteousness, one leads to death, dominion, one leads to the dominion of believers in life.

But Paul is not just contrasting Jesus and Adam. He's trying to show how much greater Jesus is. Because the effect of Jesus is to reverse the effect of Adam's sin.

Adam's sin has had dire consequences. Like in a sense the chain reaction in a double AML ad. When one little mistake leads to havoc and destruction and chaos all down the line getting worse and worse.

Jesus does the clean up job. And that is much harder. Adam's sin was small, inconsequential in one sense. It created an avalanche of sin. Jesus cleans it all up.

[16 : 00] So what Paul is saying is not just that Adam and Jesus are different, contrasting them, but that Jesus is much, much greater and more powerful in his effect than Adam.

And the point that he's then making is that if we are all subject to sin because of Adam's sin, which is evidently true because we all sin, then Jesus' death and resurrection for us is powerful enough to rescue us from the dominion of death and bring us into life eternal.

What Paul is in fact doing by the contrast is showing just how great Jesus' death and resurrection for us are. Now for the comparisons, the similarities if you like, in verses 18 and 19.

In the verses 15 to 17 when he's contrasting, the language is along the lines of not like this, but this. Now the language changes to be just as this, so also this.

So what does Paul say then in verse 18? Just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.

[17 : 11] different effects, but the similarity that Paul's drawing on is that one man influences all. Adam's sin has influenced every single person who's ever lived.

In the same way, one man, Jesus' act in dying and rising and offering grace also offers and influences all people.

He goes on in verse 19 to make the same sort of point. Just 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.

Just by Adam's sin, all people, many people, he says, sinned as a result of that. So by Jesus' one act of obedience, many people are made righteous.

Now Paul is making the point here that one person has affected all of humanity. Adam did that in his original sin and every single person is affected by that for all people's sin.

[18 : 17] But the point of the similarity is to tell us about Jesus and he's saying that Jesus' one act of dying and rising influences every single person.

That is how big it is and in that sense he describes at the end of verse 14 Adam is a type of the one who is to come. We might think linking Adam and Jesus is an odd comparison to make.

The sinner and the saviour. But the comparison that Paul makes and the reason why he says Adam is a type or a model or a pattern of Jesus who is to come is that one man affects all people.

Adam's sin affected all people. Jesus' death and righteousness affects all people. And the point that Paul is making is not just to compare but is to tell us about Jesus just how powerful his death and resurrection for us are.

That one act 2,000 years ago influences every person in this world. Paul you see is showing how high and wide and broad and deep is the grace of God to us in Jesus Christ.

[19 : 25] It is unrestricted in its offer. It is unlimited in its effectiveness. The gospel you see is for the entire human race. There is one redeemer for all people.

Paul in fact is describing Jesus' work in majestic sorts of terms. He's saying in effect if you and I sin which we do he's argued that and made that very clear in the chapters leading up to that then we can be saved by Jesus because our sin is in a sense a result of Adam but in the same way we can benefit from the result of Jesus' death and resurrection for us.

We shouldn't think that somehow that death and resurrection in Palestine 2,000 years ago would not impact upon us now here in Australia 2,000 years later. It is as powerful in fact more powerful than Adam's original sin was remote though that is from us.

There is no one who does not sin therefore the implication of what Paul is saying is there is no one who cannot benefit from the death and resurrection of Jesus and find life and grace in him and it.

There is no one who has not or will not die just as there is no one who cannot reign in life in Christ. Paul in fact uses the language of many benefiting or all benefiting.

[20 : 45] All or many have somehow been influenced by Adam's sin all or many will benefit or can benefit from Jesus. Jesus. So Paul is in fact I think implying here that he expects the gospel of Jesus Christ to actually be powerful and convert people.

He said that back in chapter 1 when he introduced the theme of this letter. The gospel of God is powerful to save. And Paul here I think is reflecting his confidence in the gospel.

Jesus' death and resurrection is powerful to save. It is more powerful than the power of sin and death in human life. That's how powerful Jesus' death and resurrection is.

So Paul is expecting that the gospel will convert people. And we also ought to expect the gospel to bring conversion. We ought to expect the witness of Christians who are under threat of martyrdom in Afghanistan to be powerful to convert Afghanistanian people whether they're Muslim or Taliban or whatever.

We ought to expect the gospel to convert people in the Sudan in Nigeria in Nepal in Israel and even in Australia. We ought to expect the gospel to convert young people and old people rich people and poor people people who are satisfied with their lives and people who are not.

[22 : 04] We ought to expect the gospel to convert Muslims Hindus Jews Buddhists Pagans people under the influence of new age religion and others. There is no one who is beyond the reach of the powerful gospel of grace in Christ.

And in effect that's what Paul is arguing here. We can see all too well the power of sin through Adam. All of us are victims of it. But the power of grace through Christ is greater and all can be beneficiaries of it.

Implied here is an incentive to us to speak the gospel because the gospel of Christ is powerful to save. Paul concludes this chapter in verses 20 and 21.

Law came in he said with the result that the trespass multiplied and sin increased. Jews of Paul's day would have thought that the law restrained sin.

Some of us think the same perhaps about law in our society. But Paul says law did not restrain sin it actually increased sin. It increased sin by making sin more sinful that is by identifying what sin is then when wrongdoers actually commit that sin it actually becomes worse because it's been identified by the law but also that sin becomes more frequent or common.

[23 : 35] There's a story which is apparently true of a retired bishop on a train. He was sitting in a carriage by himself on a train journey and the sign opposite him in the carriage said do not spit.

He had never spat in his life. But as he sat there in this carriage by himself on this train journey facing a sign that said do not spit he felt the saliva welling up in his mouth.

And for the first time in his life he spat. I often think that if they took away signs that said do not walk on this grass less people would. God you see the law somehow provokes the perversity within us to sin more and sin worse.

Paul is saying here just how great sin is. Law came in and it actually made sin even worse. Sin increased. Transgressions increased. But he says and this is the point of this whole section grace is greater.

Sin is great. grace is greater. The law came in with the result that the trespass multiplied but where sin increased grace abounded all the more.

[24 : 48] So that just as sin exercised dominion in death so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We can see how great and powerful sin is because all people die. Death reigns. But grace is greater. Because it brings eternal life and conquers death.

Making a mess is easy. It was not hard for Adam to take that forbidden fruit passed to him by his wife Eve. But the clean up job is far far greater. And Jesus has done it.

Adam's sin was easy but Jesus has done the harder job of cleaning up. Adam had set a little pebble rolling. The pebble of sin that became a snowball and an avalanche down the centuries of sin.

Jesus has stopped the avalanche by dying and rising from the dead. Winston Churchill said in August 1940, never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.

[25 : 54] But he got it wrong. Because many more owe much more to even fewer, to one man, Jesus Christ.

For he has triumphed over the greatest of human conflicts, the conflict against sin. We are condemned on account of Adam's sin, but we are declared righteous on account of Jesus' act of righteousness.

And that is grace, great grace, grace that is more powerful than sin, grace that is a generous and free gift of God extended to us through faith in Christ.

Undeserved, unmerited and unearned by us. Powerful grace, grace that is sufficient to save you and me, sufficient to save any person, old or young, rich or poor, Muslim, Hindu, Jew, pagan, new age or nothing, Australian or Afghanistanian, Nigerian or English or Indian.

The gospel grace of Christ is powerful to save. that is what Paul is saying and we give thanks to God that it is true. Amen.