

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Lesson 13, Chapter 5 continued

As we return to Romans chapter 5 we had just finished learning of Paul's approach to explaining how the Gospel works by a comparison he is making between Adam and Yeshua. In verse 12 Paul stated this:

^{CJB} **Romans 5:12** *Here is how it works: it was through one individual that sin entered the world, and through sin, death; and in this way death passed through to the whole human race, inasmuch as everyone sinned.*

Christianity, as it has a habit of doing, has taken this verse and turned it into a doctrine. It gave that doctrine a name and made it fundamental to the Christian faith: the Doctrine of Original Sin. Most Believers are aware of the Church's teaching on the original sin of Adam; however as we saw last week there are several variations on it (I told you about six variations). No matter; Paul's theology, and his entire understanding of what Yeshua's sacrificial death accomplished, rests on the proposition that it was Adam's rebellion in the Garden of Eden that introduced sin into the human race (if not the world in general) and that sin also brought death with it as a consequence. Let me be clear: Paul implies that sin did not exist in humans prior to Adam's trespass of eating the forbidden fruit; and thus death did not exist in humans before it. So Paul links sin and death as having an unbreakable bond; if you have one, you have the other. Some believe that death in the animal kingdom also did not exist, and in fact neither did time as we know it exist, until Adam sinned. Why might time not have existed before then? Because time is essentially a measure of decay, and decay is the process of dying. Yeshua said this:

Matthew 6:19-20 CJB

¹⁹ ***"Do not store up for yourselves wealth here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and burglars break in and steal.***

²⁰ ***Instead, store up for yourselves wealth in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and burglars do not break in or steal.***

Rust (oxidation) is decay; so when Christ describes the conditions here on earth He explains how moths and rust gradually degrade and ultimately destroy physical things. But, He says, in Heaven there are no moths and rust to destroy; He is describing decay in terms suitable for His era. If there is no decay then all that exists remains in its pristine state forever. We have a name for that; eternity.

All dimensions of existence (whether there are only the 3 dimensions of space that we see all around us, or more dimensions as mathematical models suggest and many physicists think there are) are necessarily dimensions that either have time as one its elements, or has eternity

as one of its elements. Time and eternity cannot co-exist because eternity, as the Bible attests, is an existence without time and thus without decay. So perhaps the Universe was originally created as 3 eternal dimensions. The 4th dimension, time, may have been part of the consequence of Adam's sin; or perhaps better put, time erupted the instant death erupted because they are fused together as one, with one being the measure of the other. Thus the 4th dimension is a kind of curse laid upon the 3 original dimensions. By the addition of time, 3 timeless dimensions were changed to 3 time-limited dimensions. And the Bible, Old and New Testaments, fundamentally approaches death as the ultimate curse. The question, then, is what can be done about it because little has terrified humans since Adam and Eve more than the prospect of our own mortality. Over the eons rich people have spent enormous sums of money trying to defeat the effects of time and to cheat death.

So I set this radical proposition before you: the Gospel is, as Paul states, the only possible remedy for Adam's sin; but even more the Gospel is meant to reverse death and decay because the Gospel will literally usher in life from the dead for humans who trust in God. Even the 3 dimensions that we all live in will eventually be renewed, never again to be cursed by the existence of the 4th dimension of time because time will no longer exist. And if it can be truly be counted as a dimension, then the 4th dimension will cease being a dimension of time, and instead will become a dimension of eternity. Sound like Science Fiction? Where in the world would Tom Bradford come up with such pseudo-science babble all mixed up with religion and God and expect you to believe it?

Revelation 21:1-7 CJB

CJB Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had passed away, and the sea was no longer there.

2 Also I saw the holy city, New Yerushalayim, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3 I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "See! God's Sh'khinah is with mankind, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and he himself, God-with-them, will be their God.

4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will no longer be any death; and there will no longer be any mourning, crying or pain; because the old order has passed away."

5 Then the One sitting on the throne said, "Look! I am making everything new!" Also he said, "Write, 'These words are true and trustworthy!'"

6 And he said to me, "It is done! I am the 'A' and the 'Z,' the Beginning and the End. To anyone who is thirsty I myself will give water free of charge from the Fountain of Life.

7 He who wins the victory will receive these things, and I will be his God, and he will be my son.

Revelation 22:1-5 CJB

CJB Revelation 22:1 Next the angel showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

² Between the main street and the river was the Tree of Life producing twelve kinds of fruit, a different kind every month; and the leaves of the tree were for healing the nations-

³ no longer will there be any curses. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him;

⁴ they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

⁵ Night will no longer exist, so they will need neither the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because ADONAI, God, will shine upon them. And they will reign as kings forever and ever.

Folks; I took us on this route to open our lesson today because too much we speak of, and think of, the Gospel in a much too limited way. We think of it in “Church” terms. We think of it as “getting saved” and then being nicer to one another. We think of it in terms of how one gains membership to a group. And of course, we think of it in terms of when we die we get to go to Heaven instead of to that other place. But the Gospel is far greater and more expansive than that; the Gospel affects everything that exists just as Adam’s sin and the resultant curse of death affects everything that exists. It is no wonder that while (on a limited basis and by God’s grace) the blood of animals could indeed atone for human sins; but the blood of bulls and goats could not literally reset the Universe. The sacrificial blood of sheep and cattle could not bring us an entirely new Creation process. But Christ’s blood could. In fact it did and (as it plays out) the Gospel is in the process of bringing us to an entirely new Creation where sin isn’t even a possibility. And since sin isn’t possible then neither is death and decay. This is why Paul was driven to take the Good News to the world at any personal cost; and it is why we should be driven as well. What a message of hope in world that has precious little to hope for.

Let’s re-read a portion of Romans chapter 5.

RE-READ ROMANS 5:12 – end

So in verse 12 Paul tells us about the effects of the original sin and how death was initially introduced into humanity (possibly into the Universe) and how it propagates; it came through the wrong deed of merely one man: Adam. But in verse 13 Paul returns to less of a theological and more of a logical/rational argument about sin in relation to the Torah (I will use the terms Torah and the Law of Moses somewhat interchangeably). He says that simple logic tells us that mankind existed a long time before God gave the Torah to Moses. So if it is the Law of Moses that is the sole source of what tells us what sin is, then what about the time between Adam and Moses when there was no Law of Moses? And Paul says that yes, of course sin was in the world before Moses (how could anyone seriously argue that point?). However he

goes on to say something rather confusing. In fact it is at this point that many good, honest Bible commentators will say that the remainder of Romans chapter 5 is very difficult, and it contains some ambiguities that could allow us to legitimately understand Paul's words in more than one way. So Paul says to end verse 13: "but sin is not counted as sin when there is no Law (no Torah)". What? Does that mean what it seems to mean? I thought back in chapters 1 and 2 that Paul had made his case that it doesn't matter whether the Law of Moses was in existence, or whether gentiles didn't have any knowledge of the Law, because the Natural Law that is known to all human beings from Adam onward tells us plainly God's standard of right and wrong; what God wants and doesn't want from humans. Thus there exists a kind of Torah (a kind of law) that is not the Law of Moses, against which all humanity in all eras are measured and so all humans can sin before God and rightfully be judged by God (Adam didn't have the Law of Moses, and yet his sin changed the nature of the world).

We have to be careful here not to take Paul's statement that where there is no Law (no Torah), then sin can't be counted as sin, too rigidly or universally, nor especially from a modern Western mindset. This statement is one of a few that Paul makes that has resulted in some dubious Christian doctrines. A misunderstanding of this admittedly difficult statement of Paul has caused the bulk of Christianity to make it a Church axiom that since without the Law of Moses there is no sin, therefore then how dumb the Jews are today, and how dumb and misguided those Israelites of old must have been, to have actually followed the Law of Moses. Because if they had just refused to follow it then they could have avoided sinning! And guess what? It's even more so for Christians. By Believers refusing to know anything about the Law of Moses we are supposedly made safe from sinning. Well if that's the case, then non-Christians are in even better shape; they certainly know nothing about the Law so these non-Believers can't possibly sin because they don't know the Law in order to disobey it, right? Then if they can't sin because they don't know anything about the Law, why would their non-existent sins need to be atoned for by Christ? I hope you see that such a doctrine is essentially a circular firing squad. It is self-evident that whatever Paul intends here, it is certainly not that. So what might he mean? I'm going to give you my opinion, but that is all that it is: my opinion. I'll necessarily have to pepper in some explanation.

Part of what we are dealing with is that there is no Greek word for Torah. And there is just one Greek word typically favored to express a law or regulation, even an established custom: **nomos**. We know from the context of a passage that sometimes when Paul speaks of law, he speaks specifically of the Law of Moses (the Torah). But at other times when he speaks of the law he is speaking of Jewish law (**Halakhah**). And yet at other times he employs the same exact term, **nomos**, to describe the law of God that all men have within us, gentile and Jew, what Judeo-Christianity has come to call the Natural Law. So when the Greek word **nomos** is used by Paul it can legitimately mean at least 3 different things: the Law of Moses, or the Natural Law, or Jewish Law. I am baffled as to why Paul didn't see the need to insert a word or two to help his readers differentiate between the three possibilities (although occasionally he does). I can only guess that he assumed that the context made it plain; or that because these letters of his always were sent to synagogues where the Believers in his day gathered, then he took it for granted that the Jews would naturally understand his meaning and, if necessary, explain it to the Believing gentiles who also attended those synagogues and/or congregation meetings. I think it is also highly likely that many times Paul's own mind didn't make a strong

distinction between the Law of Moses and Jewish Law. As a Pharisee he would have easily accepted as correct many of the rabbinic interpretations of the Law that had become traditions, and so there was no need to be too terribly precise to say whether he was speaking directly about Holy Scripture or about an interpretation of Holy Scripture.

However because since the late 2nd century there has been a doctrinal bent by gentile Christians against Jews and also against the Law of Moses (a bent that became Church Law by the 4th century), then whenever Paul uses the term law (*nomos*), it is nearly always interpreted to mean the Law of Moses. This is especially so when a statement about the law is seen as Paul saying something negative about it. So I'm going to use my own words to paraphrase what I think Paul is meaning, and then I'll explain why I think so. I believe he is saying: "Sin was indeed present in the world before the Law of Moses was given; but sin is not counted as sin when there is no divine law". Paul is saying that it is self evident that there was sin before Moses, so logically there had to be laws of God in existence even if those laws didn't come from the Law of Moses. This assumption is because if there weren't any laws of God, then truly there was no way to sin! The very definition of sin is breaking God's laws. Adam was given only ONE LAW: don't eat that fruit! He rebelled by breaking the one law God gave to him; Adam sinned.

Since Romans chapter 1 Paul has been explaining that sin is not only associated with violations of the Law of Moses; sin is also associated with violations of the Natural Law or any direct law that God might give a person. Paul has just used the example of Adam who certainly did not have the Law of Moses; and yet by a divine law that God directly pronounced to Adam (do not eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil) he broke that law and it brought death into the world. So even though there was a long time of history when there was no Law of Moses that doesn't mean that there weren't any laws of God in existence. And when a human broke those laws (any human, at any time) it was counted as sin. And as Paul explained earlier, that is why all human beings, and not just Jews, are liable to sinning and thus to experiencing God's wrath. So the sin of violating the Natural Law (or even a special law directed only at one person) is just as deadly for the sinner as it is for violating the Law of Moses.

So the reason that Paul said what he said in verse 13 (something that is so confusing to us in our time) is because he is talking about the period of time between Adam and Moses before there was such a thing as the Law of Moses. He was addressing the straw man that he has been debating with since the beginning of Romans, and Paul's straw man has incorrectly surmised: 'but sin is impossible without the Law of Moses'. As it turns out, that actually **was** the belief within mainstream Judaism of Paul's day. Paul of course was well aware of it and he was refuting that thought because it went against his theology concerning the Gospel.

Verse 14 goes a long way towards validating my opinion about the intent of verse 13. That is, Paul says that even though Adam received a direct, personal commandment from God that he violated, the entire human race that came from Adam continued sinning in his own way and so experienced death. Yet humans couldn't possibly have committed the same sin Adam did because humans were no longer allowed to live in the Garden where the forbidden tree was located. Thus there had to be some common, unspoken divine laws that humans violated. Or

as Paul phrases it, the sinners were: "Those whose sinning was not exactly like Adam's violation of a direct command". Paul ends verse 14 by saying that Adam prefigured someone who would come later (Paul is alluding to Christ).

Yet in verse 15, after just saying that Adam prefigured Christ, Paul nuances his statement by saying that even so there are differences between Adam and Yeshua (these are the kinds of things Paul does that drives Bible academics crazy). He says that the free gift from Yeshua (righteousness) is not like the offense that Adam committed. He says that because of the bad deed of one man, many have died. However from the good deed of a different man, Yeshua, God's grace has come to just as many. And that because of the bad deed of one man, every human has been judicially condemned to death. However because of the good deed of one man, a judicial pardon is available. Even more, the pardon is a free gift.

So in verse 17 Paul says that because death and sin are blood-brothers, Adam's sin opened the door for the dominion of death to enter in and rule over mankind. However because God offers the free gift of righteousness to sinners, made possible by Yeshua's death on the cross, then this has opened the door for the dominion of life to enter in and rule over mankind. So the Adam-caused dominion of death gets counteracted by the Yeshua-caused dominion of life. The point to notice from the perspective of trying to understand where Paul is going with this is that even though he first says that Adam prefigured Christ, it is not a comparison of like-for-like that Paul winds up making but rather quite a stark contrast. Adam caused judgment; Yeshua caused righteousness. Adam caused death; Yeshua caused life. Other than the comparison that 2 human men caused these things to happen to many other humans, what is produced from these 2 men are opposite results.

Before we go farther I want to explain some things about Paul that you may already be picking up on and perhaps it will help you in your personal study. Paul tends to communicate in a somewhat casual conversational style. So it is not unusual for him to make a rather bold (even brash) statement and then walk it back a little bit because he knows he may have gone a tad overboard or has found himself suddenly headed in a direction he didn't intend to go. He also tends to discuss a faith issue or a God-principle or an area of theology that might have several complex aspects to it, but highlights only one or two of the aspects and doesn't confront the other aspects at all. Without a more thorough reading it can seem to the Bible student that those one or two aspects Paul highlights are the ONLY aspects of that issue or principle that exist (or perhaps are the only aspects of any importance), even though that is not the case. My conclusion is that this highlighting he does has everything to do with whom he is talking to and what the specific agenda is that he is trying to communicate. Paul rightly assumes that anyone reading his letters is directly associated with the congregation to whom he is writing, whether it is at Ephesus, Corinth, or Rome. Despite what the institutional Church has done with his letters (that is, to make them out to be general theological proclamations and teachings applicable to all Christians in all circumstances) that is far from the case. And for centuries the assertion of theologians has been that when taken together Paul's letters are an intentional, organized system of Christian theology that Paul is carefully crafting; I thoroughly deny that this is the case.

So in verse 18 when he explains something that he's already addressed 2 or 3 times in this

section, he says that just as it was one offense (one sin) that brought **all** human beings under condemnation (Adam's original sin), so it is that with one righteous act (Yeshua going to the cross) that **all** people may be considered righteous, he is speaking using sweeping words but at the same time is dealing with a narrow issue. For instance: saying that because of this righteous act (presumably of Yeshua) ALL people can be considered righteous is simply not true. He has taken the Adam pattern too far (typical Paul). While it is true that Adam's sin indeed brought death to ALL people who would come after him, it is definitely NOT true that Christ's sacrifice brings righteousness to ALL people. So, again typical Paul, he just made another bold statement and has gone a bit overboard, and so in verse 19 he begins to walk his statement back.

In verse 19 he says that through the disobedience of one man (Adam) **many** were made sinners, so through the obedience of one man (Yeshua) **many** will be made righteous. Wait a minute: just a second ago he said Adam made ALL people sinners, now it is many. Just a second ago Paul said ALL people were made righteous by Christ's sacrifice, now it's many. What happened? It is simply Paul being Paul. It is his style and he loves to use metaphors and analogies, and fitting for his era he takes some poetic liberties to make them impactful. I'm in no way denigrating Paul or criticizing him. I'm not saying Paul is suspect. I'm saying that of the many writers of the Bible, Paul is the last one that we should be plucking out one of his statements and making it into a Church doctrine because very likely he'll have more to say on that topic and he'll say something different about it next time. Verses 18 and 19 are a perfect example of this. Some denominations prefer verse 18 and so say that Paul's theology is that the entire world....every last human....has been redeemed by Christ's death. Period. It is just that only some realize their redemption and some don't. This is actually an understanding within the Catholic Church (among other churches) and emphasized by Pope Francis fairly recently and Pope John Paul II some years ago. Here is a quote from Pope John Paul II: ***"In the Holy Spirit, every individual and all people have become, through the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, children of God, partakers in the divine nature and heirs to eternal life. All are redeemed and called to share in glory in Jesus Christ, without any distinction of language, race, nation or culture."***

However to those denominations that prefer to lean on verse 19, then it is only **some** people who will be saved and the remainder won't be. The saved were in some Heavenly lottery and "elected" or "predestined" by God to be saved; this is a precept that Calvin held.

It is critical in all Bible books to look at the immediate, but also the broader, context of what is being said on any particular subject or within any particular passage, or we can find ourselves losing our bearings and coming up with some incorrect conclusions; it is especially so with the Apostle Paul. We must not only look at an entire chapter but rather an entire book (or letter) he has written and sometimes we even have to look to all of Paul's letters as a whole to distill his actual theology on any given principle. At all times we must keep at the forefront of our minds that even though he was Christ's personally chosen Apostle to the gentiles, he was not a gentile. Paul was still a Jew of Jews and a Pharisee of Pharisees according to his own description of himself. He thought like a Jew because he was born a Jew and that was his cultural upbringing. He thought in the religious terms of Judaism, because he was trained at the elite school of Judaism, in Jerusalem, at the Academy of Gamaliel. Paul could not get into

the mind of a gentile because he was not one. Indeed because he was a Diaspora Jew he had a certain social comfort level with, and tolerance for, gentiles that Holy Land Jews did not have. But even when Paul is directly addressing gentiles he uses Jewish thoughts and terms to communicate because that's who he was. We must always understand Paul within his Jewish cultural character and recognize that some of the especially difficult and ambiguous things he says are very likely Jewish cultural expressions commonly used in his day but whose meanings have become lost to history. This is what makes reading Paul both fascinating and frustrating, and fraught with potholes.

So now in verse 20 Paul starts to pull together what he has been saying into a conclusion for the purpose of establishing a doctrine. I'll tell you in advance that what he has been saying about the Law of Moses would have been shocking, even insulting, to most of his Jewish readers. He has put the Torah in a less than stellar light. No doubt he intended to shock them. You don't shock people by being gentle and diplomatic, something which Paul would have been ill suited for anyway. So he says that the reason that the Law of Moses was created by God, and then given to Israel when He gave it, was so that offenses against God would increase. Where we find the word proliferate in our CJB (sin would proliferate), or increase or abound in other English versions, the Greek word is *pleonazo*. This word means to super-abound; to increase super-abundantly. It is a word that indicates an extreme amount of growth. However, says Paul, to counteract the super amount of increase of sin that the Law would produce, the Lord would super increase grace to an even higher level. Paul has done it again. He has made a bold, brash statement that essentially reduces the purpose and scope of the Torah, the Jews' venerated and ancient Holy Book, to something mostly negative if not intrinsically faulty. Rather than causing righteousness to come about, the Law causes sins and curses to explode to unheard of levels. To hear Paul tell it thus far in the Book of Romans, the Torah is akin to a Trojan Horse sent by God to His chosen people. Yet, says verse 21, this is all part of God's plan for grace to overtake sin and death as the ruler of this world. And this Torah that causes sin ironically brings on even more grace; the grace causes more people to be righteoused by God, and in the end they wind up with eternal life.

First: while this is a great piece of hyperbole, it is also Paul speaking truthfully and accurately about one narrow aspect of a complex subject: the Torah. He knows, as does anyone who has seriously studied the Torah that the Torah was given as a blessing and a gift of life by God to His people.

Second: as exaggerated and negative as Paul has made his comment about the purpose of the Torah, nonetheless it exposes a great truth about humanity. It is that the more we're told what NOT to do, the more we want to do it. There is something about long lists of do's and don'ts that energizes our evil inclinations. Our evil inclination wants to do whatever it is that God does not want us to do, and vice versa. The Law, in its detail and explanation, comprehensively reveals God's will for our lives. The generality of the Natural Law has given way to the explicitness of the Law of Moses. There's no hiding from our behavior and our thoughts; there's no ambiguity with the Law. We don't have to wonder if we're doing right or wrong; the Law of Moses makes it clear. Not only are the laws set out, so are the God-ordained penalties for breaking the laws. So in that sense, the Law increased sins. The Law exposes sin in our lives for what it is truly is.

But Paul, in his brashness, has also created an impression in his straw man that is just bursting to come out. Can Paul really be saying that essentially the more we sin the more grace God gives? Can Paul really be implying that sin is a good thing because it increases grace; that it is practically our religious duty to sin more so that more grace can be applied and therefore God gets even more glory? And that is why God gave the Torah to Moses and Israel?

But even more, according to this line of reasoning suddenly God's chosen people have been put at a horrible disadvantage. God rescues them from Egypt, gives them His Torah on Mt. Sinai, demands that they obey it, and when they do they find themselves in a much more dangerous position than the gentiles who weren't given the Torah. After all; by Paul's logic who is the most exposed to the danger of God's wrath? The people who do not have the Law or the people who do? If the entire purpose of the Torah is to create more sin, then what has ever been the benefit to following the Torah? And why would God do this to Israel? Paul seems to have dug himself into a deep hole. Next week we'll begin chapter 6 and see how he digs himself out.