

At its best Christianity has always recognized this and affirmed that an unchallenged faith which knows nothing of uncertainty and the desert is no faith at all. It has grasped that there are two types of darkness; the darkness of absence and the darkness created by the shadow of that which is near. It is this latter darkness of which this Psalm speaks: a darkness which the greatest saints have grasped is the mark of spiritual maturity rather than of weak faith.

In the footsteps of the master:

There is a Messianic element to this psalm which must not be missed. Ultimately the promises of verses 5b-7 found their fulfilment in Jesus and he himself, as 'great David's greater son', experienced the unfathomable

darkness of Gethsemane and Golgotha that only the sinless Son of God who had enjoyed the unfettered intimacy of the Trinity from eternity past could experience.

Thus, if David and Jesus found their trials such that they were nearly overwhelmed we can gain encouragement from the fact that our experiences are not unique and that despite the battle they both found toe-holds in their darkness which enabled them (and will enable us) to secure their footing until the storms subsided. Gerhard Tersteegen had understood this. He said:

*Jesus still lead on
Till our rest be won
And although the way be cheerless
We will follow, calm and fearless.
Guide us by your hand
To our Fatherland.*

Adam and Christ (Romans 5:12-21)

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The second half of chapter 5 marks a new point of departure in Paul's thinking. In some ways, of course, this change has been implicit all along, since chapter 1 begins with the creation of the world, and the problem of human sin is the major theme of the first four chapters of the epistle. Yet it is interesting to note that although the story of Adam lies behind everything which has been said so far, Paul does not specifically mention it until we reach this point, where he is particularly concerned to explain the work of Christ to us. The close association, amounting to parallelism, between Adam and Christ is one of the hallmarks of Paul's theology. He was always concerned to get back to the root of things, to examine the ultimate cause, or first principle of the situation in which we now find ourselves. The new life given to us in Christ is such a radical departure from what has gone before that it can be properly understood only by going straight back to Adam. Christ's work of salvation reaches back beyond the framework of God's covenant with Israel, important though that is, to the very roots of human existence. Here is the ultimate reason why Christ's work extends to the salvation of

the Gentiles as well as the Jews, because we are all united, on the same basis, in our common descent from the first man.

Original sin?

Verse 12 has been the subject of considerable controversy down through the centuries, and it would not be too much to say that the major differences which exist among Christians concerning the fundamental question of original sin stem ultimately from the way in which this verse has been understood. For this reason, we need to look at it very carefully, and examine the development of Paul's thought in the light of his argument as a whole. First of all, it is clear that Paul builds a logical sequence from the disobedience of one man to the spread of sin in the world, and from there to the appearance of death, which is coterminous with the extent of sin. The question is then whether the spread of death results from the fact that all have sinned, or whether the spread of death has produced a situation in which all men have subsequently sinned. In other

words, is sin the cause of death, or is death the cause of sin?

To answer this question we need to follow Paul's argument very carefully. First, we are told that it was through the disobedience of one man that sin entered the world. Paul does not elaborate on this here, but we know that his language is a kind of shorthand to describe the momentous events of Genesis 3, in which Adam, tempted by Satan, working through his wife Eve, disobeyed God and broke the relationship which God had intended Adam to have with him. Adam's disobedience was an act of his own free will, for which he had no-one to blame but himself. This did not stop him from trying to shift the blame to Eve and the serpent, but God held Adam responsible for his act on the ground that he knew better. Adam was therefore guilty in the sight of God, and was forced to pay a price for his guilt. The protection against death which he had enjoyed in the Garden of Eden was taken away and Adam became subject to death. The fact that his relationship with God was now one of rebellion, rather than one of obedience, was confirmed by the continuing presence of sin in his life, which manifested itself in the second generation, when Adam's son Cain killed his brother Abel, and within a few generations the whole human race was so corrupt that God decided to wipe it out in the flood.

But although the sins of Adam's descendants were undoubtedly more numerous and more obnoxious than his own sin was, it was that sin, and not theirs—or ours—which was held to be responsible for the fall of the human race. Because of that, it was Adam's sin, the sin of disobedience, which had to be put right if mankind was going to enjoy genuine peace and reconciliation with God. In God's eyes, sin is not a thing which can be measured according to a scale of objective moral values. We tend to think that murder is worse than stealing, that stealing is worse than lying, and that lying is worse than thinking evil thoughts. Our legal system enshrines this basic belief by demanding life imprisonment (or, until recently, the death penalty) for murder, a much shorter prison sentence for stealing, a punishment for lying only if it can be proved, and then tied to something more serious, like fraud or a breach of national security, and nothing at all for thinking evil thoughts!

The grading of sins

Grading sins like this is so ingrained in our way of thinking that if someone were to propose the death penalty for lying, let us say, we would immediately think that this was an injustice and demand a lighter penalty. The Christian church has also fallen into this way of thinking from time to time, most noticeably in the late Middle

Ages, when it came to dominate official attitudes towards sin. Sin was classified according to different categories, each of which was carefully defined and allotted an appropriate penance in order to avoid what would otherwise be an equally appropriate period of cleansing in purgatory. The reformers sharply repudiated this way of thinking, but some of it crept back into Protestantism at a later stage, and it is far from dead even yet. In fact, wherever a legalistic cast of mind is in control, this kind of thinking is inevitable, whether it manifests itself in a developed doctrine of purgatory or not.

In God's eyes, by contrast, sin is regarded above all as disobedience to him. It does not matter whether that disobedience is murder, theft or eating forbidden fruit. It is our relationship with God which decides the issue, not the nature of our action. Even murder is not wrong if it is commanded by God—Saul was condemned, remember, not for slaying the Amalekites but for being humanitarian enough to spare their lives when God had specifically ordered him not to! The justice of God is different from the justice of men because it is based on a different principle. This explains why mortality, which is essentially a human form of justice, is one of the greatest enemies of true Christian faith, and why ethics is a discipline which is rooted in a pagan, not a Judaeo-Christian cultural background. It is a way of thinking which belongs to the law and its works, not to the relationship which we have with God by faith.

Sin therefore is not to be quantified according to human ideas of right and wrong, but must be understood in terms of Adam's disobedience to God and the consequences which inevitably flowed from that. To know God is to have eternal life with him, so it is not surprising that to be cut off from God is to be cut off from life as well. Now it is at this point that serious disagreement among Christians begins to arise. The general picture which has dominated the theological tradition is that sin is a kind of disease, a blot on the soul or a defect in the works of creation which produces disabilities, defects and death. The idea that illness and poverty, for example, are somehow the result of sin, was combated as long ago as the Book of Job, but it continues to dominate the way many ordinary people think today. To believe that a Christian who has been freed from the power of sin is therefore automatically entitled to health and wealth is to fall into precisely this trap, and we do not have to go far today to find this idea at work in our midst!

Created immortal?

However, there is no evidence that the death which sin brought into the world involved any fundamental change in human nature. As far as we can tell from Scripture, Adam was created as a mortal being, with a

human life-cycle which, in the natural course of events, would have begun and ended, just like the life-cycle of animals or plants. It can be argued, with considerable plausibility, that in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were protected from things which would cause their death, but that is not the same thing as saying that they were immortal by nature. When they were expelled from the Garden, the protection was removed, but in physical terms, Adam and Eve remained the same beings as before. When Christ came in the form of Adam, he was not a superior being but a man like us, which ought to be sufficient evidence for this argument. Furthermore, when the immortal angels fell from grace, they did not cease to be immortal—Satan and his hosts dwell in the same spiritual dimension as God, even though they are cut off from him. Nor, finally, do Christians cease to be Adamic creatures when they are converted. Paul tells us elsewhere (Cor. 15:50) that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, and that is true, whether we are born again in Christ or not.

The death which is referred to here is spiritual death, the state of being cut off from God, and this spiritual death has now spread to the entire human race. It is a broken relationship with the creator which is passed on from one generation to the next. It is never finally or perfectly healed in this life, for although Christian parents are given promises that their children are holy in the sight of God (Cor. 7:14), they are never told that their children are exempt from the common human experience of sin and death. If you think that because you are a Christian then your children are sinless, take another look at their behaviour! The most difficult part of this verse is its last clause. Paul affirms that all men have sinned, but why? Here the arguments begin! The Greek words are ambiguous and can mean any one of at least three things. They may be taken to refer to Adam, and translated *in whom*. They may be taken to refer to death, and translated *because of which*, or they may be taken to refer to the sequence of events as a whole and be translated *and so*.

Two ways

We are thus faced with a choice. Have all men sinned because Adam sinned, and because we were in some way included in him at that time? This is a very Jewish way of thinking (see Hebrews 7:9–10), and Augustine adopted it as his explanation of what Paul meant here. Or has man sinned because he is now spiritually dead, and therefore has no option? This interpretation restricts original sin to Adam's act, of which we have inherited the consequences—but not the responsibility or the guilt. This view has been widely held among Eastern Orthodox theologians, and in the West it is represented by the so-called Pelagian and Arminian

traditions. The claim is that man is not guilty unless and until he sins himself, so that a baby who dies, for example, is not held responsible for sin and goes to heaven straightaway. The third possibility dissociates our sins from that of Adam, saying only that the weakness and limitations which death has naturally brought into the world make it practically impossible for us to avoid sinning now. This view has been taken up by different strands of Christian Platonism, and nowadays it is a basic assumption of liberal humanism, which forms the official ideology of our culture.

Which of these views is right? In terms of the Greek text, the best interpretation is the second, which provides a casual link between death and sin. But the theological development usually associated with this reading is inadequate, because it does not follow Paul's logic back to the beginning of the verse. It is true that we have all sinned because we are all spiritually dead, but this state of death carries with it the guilt and responsibility for sin which brought it about in the first place. We must therefore respect the insight of the Augustinian tradition and accept its validity as the best interpretation of this verse, even when we are compelled to reject the exegetical reasoning which lay behind its original formulation. Augustine was a good theologian, but an indifferent textual critic!

The history of sin

Paul then goes on to outline the history of sin from the fall until the coming of Christ. He sees this as a two-stage process, in which stage one covers the period from Adam to Moses, the man to whom God gave the law. In this period, which incidentally included Abraham and the other Patriarchs of Israel, sin was present in the world, but it was dormant. Man was in rebellion against God, but because he did not know what God demanded of those who would be in fellowship with him, there was no conscious awareness of the problem. However, the presence of sin, and the fact that it was unacceptable to God was made evident by the universality of death, both spiritual and physical, during this period. We cannot therefore conclude that man was better off before the law was given — only that he was unaware of the true nature of his predicament.

Paul goes on to reinforce this fact by using legal language to describe the sin of Adam. Up to this point he has carefully distinguished between sin, as a state of sinfulness inherent in mankind because of Adam's sin, and the concept of transgression, not against the law of Moses, to be sure, but against the law of God, which had been given to him directly. The sins of Adam's descendants were different from his, but ultimately they carried the same stigma of transgression, understood as disobedience, which belonged to Adam's sin.

Stage two of the history of sin covers the period from Moses to Christ, but Paul postpones his discussion of that, and continues to draw out the implications of what Christ has done in the light of Adam's transgression. He begins in verse 15, by pointing out that although Adam is the model for Christ, and Christ's work must be understood as paralleling and correcting Adam's sin, there is nevertheless an enormous difference between them. Adam's transgression brought death to many, but the grace of God and his free gift of the man Jesus Christ has had a much greater effect. The reason for this is that Adam sinned once and the whole human race was condemned — a little deed had an enormous consequence. But the grace of God in Christ is not a little deed! God does not deal only with the single sin of one man, but with a great many sins, all of which he puts right by the sacrifice of Christ's blood. His power is therefore much greater than that of Adam, because at a single stroke he put right everything which Adam's sin had led to over many generations! Christ's work of salvation is not a slow repair job done on the human race, a series of exercises designed to remove sin by degrees, but one great act by which the debt of sin is cancelled at one stroke.

Getting inside Paul's mind

In trying to understand these difficult verses, we need to get inside Paul's mind and appreciate the way it works. This is all the more necessary because it is different from our own way of thinking. Paul understands sin as a problem which became progressively more entrenched in the human race as time went on. The fundamental fact of disobedience remained unchanged, but the opportunities for it to manifest itself grew and multiplied as the human race expanded and explored new areas in which to manifest its rebellion against God. The grace of God is more powerful still however, because at a single stroke it can reach right down to the root of this spreading of sin and kill it. However, we need to understand God's power in this way and not, as many do, in a way which interprets these verses to mean that because everyone dies as a result of Adam's sin, so everyone must be saved as a result of Christ's sacrifice.

The universality of sin does not entail universal salvation, and this for two reasons. First, universal salvation would destroy the meaning of faith, yet Paul repeatedly says that faith is the reason for our justification. If unbelievers are to be saved, the whole basis of God's covenant would be removed at a single stroke. However we interpret Christ's removal of the transgression of Adam, we cannot do so in a way which destroys the covenant context in which Christ came to do his work. It is in the light of the promise given to Abraham that the sin of Adam is paid for, and we must retain this

order in our own understanding of the text. Second, universal salvation would provide a parallel to the sin of Adam without indicating that Christ is superior to him. Yet Paul insists that any parallel must have this superiority built into it—Christ must recover what Adam has lost and go farther still. If numbers are the main issue, this would presumably have to mean either that Christ has saved people who did not come under the curse of Adam, or that his saving power extends to other creatures, like animals for instance, whom Adam's sin did not touch either. But this is absurd! The difference between Adam's sin and Christ's sacrifice cannot be explained in terms of quantitative breadth, but must be explored in the context of qualitative depth, which alone can account for the way in which the apostle expresses himself here.

Paul brings this out by contrasting the reign of death with the reign of life in verse 17. The difference between them is not that the reign of life embraces a wider section of humanity; if we follow Christ's teaching about the covenant, we realize that in fact it covers only a small section of those who suffer the reign of death. The true difference between death and life is qualitative. Death is negative and destructive, whereas life is positive and creative. Those who are subject to the former can do nothing but submit to its control—all their activities and achievements are ultimately worthless and condemned to destruction. But those who have been liberated by the latter are free to draw on the abundant resources of God's free grace to build and create with a sense of purpose which goes beyond the limits of this world.

Paul now moves on to develop his theme farther, and he does this in a way which appears on the surface to demand a universalistic interpretation of the gift of salvation. The church is not short of theologians who regard these verses as proof positive that the Christian gospel is essentially universalistic, and that the message of Christ will eventually embrace every human being. Once again though, we need to understand what Paul is saying in the context of the covenant idea. Adam's sin extends naturally to all men because we are all descended from him and share in his relationship with God, a relationship which is intrinsic to his creation. Whether this relationship should be called a covenant or not is largely a matter of vocabulary. Theologians tend to apply it to Adam and creation, even though the Bible generally restricts the term to God's special relationship with Abraham and his descendants. We do not need to worry too much about this as long as we understand that the difference between Adam and Abraham is fundamental to Paul's argument.

Christ's work of justification affects those who suffer the curse of Adam, but because his work was carried out in terms of the covenant made with Abraham, it can be applied only to those who belong to that covenant. Paul has already spent several

chapters explaining that descent from Abraham is not to be understood in natural, or Adamic terms, but must be interpreted in the context of faith. We are related to Adam by flesh and blood, but we are related to Abraham by faith in God's promise, which he fulfilled in Christ. Christ's work therefore makes sense only in the light of Abraham, not in the light of Adam, even though it deals with Adam's transgression. The extension of Abraham's covenant to all men means, as the first few chapters of Romans make abundantly clear, that Gentiles may have faith, as well as Jews. The gospel is therefore not limited by radical considerations, but neither is it applied automatically to every human being. If we take verses 18-19 out of context, Abraham is a missing link whose absence leads naturally to universalism. But if we set these verses in the context of the epistle as a whole, we understand what their true frame of reference is, and realize that Paul's teaching cannot legitimately be read in a universalistic sense.

Verse 19 brings out clearly what has been implicit all along. This is that sin and redemption must be understood in terms of disobedience and obedience. In other words, they are categories of relationship, not categories of activities. It is not so much what Adam and Christ did that matters; we are not asked to compare eating fruit with dying on a cross in order to decide which of these two is a greater or more difficult act. In terms of human justice, we would have to admit that crucifixion seems a rather harsh penalty to pay for what Adam actually did in the garden. The real problem does not lie in the act, but in the attitude which lies behind it. Here again we come back to the dominant theme of this epistle and of the Gospels as a whole. By itself, eating of the forbidden fruit was not a very serious crime; it certainly

could not compare, say, with cutting down the tree! But because it was an act of disobedience, it had consequences which reached far beyond the immediate circumstances. Likewise the death of Christ, considered as an isolated act, was a scandalous injustice which could benefit nobody who was involved in it. Yet because it was an act of supreme obedience to God the Father, it too had consequences which went far beyond the merely physical limits of the historical event.

Obedience and disobedience are things which cannot be measured in terms of the consequences which follow them. They must be measured in terms of the one to whom obedience is due. When that person is God, the true significance of the attitude underlying the act becomes apparent. In God's eyes, the thought is just as important as the deed, which is why the man who has hatred in his heart towards another person is just as guilty of murder as the man who has actually taken a knife to his enemy and killed him.

Paul concludes this section by returning briefly to the law, whose significance he will go on to expound in the next couple of chapters. For the moment, he is content merely to reaffirm what he has already said in 3:20, which is that the law came in order to sharpen our awareness of sin and anchor it more deeply in our consciousness. But now Paul adds immediately that wherever the law has strengthened the power of sin, the grace of God has shown itself to be more powerful still. This grace is at work in Christ who, after being presented as the prophet who came to fulfil the Scriptures and as the priest who came to make the sacrificial offering, is now revealed as the king whose purpose is to spread the reign of grace, so that, as inheritors of his righteousness, we might obtain the precious gift and promise of eternal life.

Challenging Hypnosis Stereotypes

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Not everyone thinks hypnosis is a good thing even when it is applied clinically and with the best intentions. The stronger objections come from Christians who argue that there is something fundamentally wrong with hypnosis.

Biblical support is offered for such views with reference to Deuteronomy 18:10-11 which deserves exact quotation since it appears to be the sole source advanced: