

Lesson 52 at StudyRomans.org

Romans 5:12, Continued

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—

When we ended last week, we had started looking at verse 12, and we had asked the question: why Adam rather than Eve? Eve was the one who committed the first sin — why is Adam getting all the blame? I think we can point to at least five reasons.

- First, Adam was the first to be created and so all mankind descends first and foremost from Adam, and so Adam was the natural choice for the representative of the old creation.
- Second, Adam the patriarch was the head of his family, and that likewise makes him the natural choice over Eve to be the representative of the old creation.
- Third, the prohibition against eating from the tree was given to Adam before Eve was even created, and so Adam had the first responsibility to make sure that command was obeyed both by himself and by his family.
- Fourth, while Eve was deceived by the serpent (as Paul himself tells us in 1 Timothy 2:14), Adam, it seems, ate the fruit willingly and with full knowledge of what he was doing. As Paul tells us in that same verse, Adam was not deceived (1 Timothy 2:14).

- Fifth, after they both ate, God called out to Adam rather than to Eve in Genesis 3:9, and God placed the responsibility on Adam in Genesis 3:11 — “Have **you** eaten of the tree of which I commanded **you** not to eat?” God blamed Adam, and we know that was how Adam understood it because it was immediately after that question from God that Adam attempted to place the blame on Eve rather than on himself.

I think any and likely all of those five reasons explain why we see Adam rather than Eve both here in Romans 5 and in 1 Corinthians 15. And perhaps we should add to that list a sixth reason — I think it would have been very unlikely for Paul to ever compare Jesus with a woman.

Our next question about verse 12 involves death. The verse says “just as sin came into the world through one man, and **death** through sin, and so **death** spread to all men because all sinned.” Is that spiritual death or physical death?

We looked at this same question earlier about another verse — Romans 1:32 in Lesson 22. In that verse, death was described as the punishment for sin, and, as here, we asked whether that death was physical death or spiritual death.

As we recall from that earlier lesson, the Bible teaches us that physical death is a consequence of sin rather than a punishment of sin. Yes, some sins are punished by physical death, but most are not. But all sins are punished by spiritual death unless those sins are forgiven.

Here is where we ended up in Lesson 22 on that earlier verse: Adam’s sin made us mortal (Genesis 3:19); our own sin makes us

guilty (Romans 6:23). For Christians, Jesus removes our guilt now (1 Corinthians 6:11); Jesus will remove our mortality later (1 Corinthians 15:53). The choice to obey or reject the gospel of Christ is not a choice between **physical** life and **physical** death but instead is a choice between **spiritual** life and **spiritual** death. That is what we saw back in Lesson 22.

So, with that review about Romans 1:32, what can we say about Romans 5:12? Is the death here spiritual death or physical death?

I think it must be spiritual death. It is true that both physical death and spiritual death entered the world through Adam, and I think we can say from Genesis 3:17-23 that **physical** death spread to all men because of **Adam's** sin. But that is not what this verse says. Instead, this verse says that this death spread to all men — not because Adam sinned — but because **all** sinned. The death here in verse 12 is on my shoulders because of my sin, not because of Adam's sin. And the only death that fits that description is spiritual death. I die physically because of Adam's sin, but I die spiritually because of my own sin.

We know physical death is not a consequence of our own sin because babies and children experience physical death even though they have never sinned. When they physically die, it is not because they sinned, but rather because Adam sinned. The curse in Genesis 3:19 that came from Adam's sin is a curse under which we all still live today: "for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." And we are not under that curse because we sinned; we are under that curse because Adam sinned.

But not so with spiritual death, and there is no verse any more clear on that fact than the verse we are now studying: “death spread to all men because all sinned.”

If I had not sinned, then I would not have spiritually died. If I had not sinned, I would not need salvation. And, again, there are many today who are in that category. Babies, for example, have never sinned; babies have not experienced spiritual death; even if babies experience physical death, they nevertheless remain alive spiritually. Spiritual death has not spread to them because they have not sinned.

And perhaps those facts are the best explanation for a wonderful statement from Christ:

Luke 18:16-17 — But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

And I think we see all of this again in another epistle of Paul, but from the perspective of physical death rather than spiritual death. And, not surprisingly, we find that discussion of physical death in the great resurrection chapter of 1 Corinthians 15.

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 — But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

“For as in Adam all die.” That is not spiritual death. How do we know that? We know that because we just read it in Romans 5:12 — spiritual death spread to me because I sinned, not because Adam sinned. And we also know that from the context of 1 Corinthians 15 — that chapter is all about our resurrection from physical death on the last day. That chapter is all about the resurrection of Christ from physical death.

We all die physically because of what Adam did in that garden. That is what we see in Genesis 3. And that physical death is the death that we see in 1 Corinthians 15. “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive ... at his coming.” Those verses are describing our resurrection from physical death on the last day.

And yes, it is time once again to talk about Calvinism. And there is one thing about the Calvinists that I will never understand — most of them view Romans as their favorite book! That seems incredible to me given how often Romans demolishes their false views about God and about the gospel of Christ.

And Romans 5:12 is a perfect example. Calvin teaches that babies are born tainted with the sin of Adam. That is why Calvin writes about “elect infants,” which of course means there are also non-elect infants destined only for Hell (according to Calvin). That ungodly view cannot survive verse 12. If I am headed for Hell because I am spiritually dead due to sin, then verse 12 tells me that sin is my sin. That sin is not Adam’s sin. Yes, I will physically die because of what Adam did long ago, but if I have died spiritually then that is because of what I did. That is because of my sin.

And for a baby who, of course, has never sinned, there is no spiritual taint of any sort on that sinless infant. That baby is spiritually alive

for the simple reason that he or she has never spiritually died. And to suggest otherwise flies in the face of what Jesus said when he called the children unto him in Luke 18, as well as many other verses.

The tenets of Calvinism are usually remembered using the acronym TULIP, and the “T” in that acronym stands for Total Depravity, which is the false view that we are all born sinful and are unable to choose God on our own. Many verses show us that doctrine is false, but Romans 5:12 really drives a stake through it! If I am spiritually dead, then it was not because I was born that way but rather it was because I sinned.

The other tenets in TULIP are (2) Unconditional election, (3) Limited atonement, (4) Irresistible grace, and (5) Perseverance of the Saints — and none of them survive Romans! Calvinism is false from beginning to end — and verse 12 proves that about the first petal on that ungodly tulip!

Romans 5:13

Romans 5:13 — for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.

Yes, this is a difficult verse, but we have already looked at it. We considered this verse back when we looked at Romans 4:15, which said: “For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.” Both in that verse and in this verse we find that phrase “no law.” And both verses tell us something about sin where there is no law.

- (4:15) Where there is **no law** there is **no transgression**.
- (5:13) **Sin is not counted** where there is **no law**.

Our plan in a moment will be to review what we said earlier about Romans 4:15, and then see if it still makes sense now that we have reached Romans 5:13. But before we do that, let's look at the first half of verse 13: "for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given." What does that mean, and why does Paul say it?

First, what is "the law" in that phrase? As we have seen, anytime we see the word "law" preceded by the definite article "the," it is most likely referring to the law of Moses. Is that the case here? Yes, I think it is. I think "the law" in verse 13 is the law of Moses. Why?

First, we have the general rule that favors "the law" being the law of Moses. But we also have that word "given" — "before the law was given." We see that same word elsewhere in verses that we know are talking about the law of Moses.

2 Chronicles 34:14 — While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiyah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD **given** through Moses.

John 1:17 — For the law was **given** through Moses...

John 7:19 — Has not Moses **given** you the law?...

I think that, likewise, the law that was given here in verse 13 was the law of Moses. And that conclusion also makes sense from the context given that Paul will soon mention Moses in verse 14. That verse will confirm that Paul is talking here about the time between Adam and

Moses, and that time period is the time before the law was given here in verse 13.

What does Paul tell us about that time period between Adam and Moses? He tells us that sin was in the world during the time period. He tells us that sin predated the law of Moses.

But didn't we already know that? Didn't we know that there was sin in the garden, long before Moses was born? Didn't we already know that there was so much sin in the world prior to Moses that God destroyed the world with a great flood? Why is Paul telling us this?

The reason Paul is telling us something we already know is because it is part of a larger argument in which Paul is telling us something that we might not already know — and especially something that his original readers might not have already known. That is the way a logical argument works. It lays out a series of steps, many of which we might already know, but it does so to prove a conclusion that we might not have already known.

That is what is going on here. Paul is laying out some things that we already know so that he can piece them together into something we might not already know. And what is that thing we might not know? Let's wait until Paul gets there in his argument.

For now, let's look at the second half of verse 13. "For sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, **but sin is not counted where there is no law.**" What does that mean?

Let's start with what it does **not** mean. It cannot possibly mean that sin was not counted prior to the law of Moses. God destroyed the entire world with a flood because of sin that was committed prior to the

law of Moses. And God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah prior to the law of Moses — an event that Jude 7 tells us serves “as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.” We know that sin was counted prior to the law of Moses. There are people undergoing a punishment of eternal fire because of that sin.

So what does that fact tell us about verse 13? It tells us that the word “law” is being used in two different ways in that one verse. “The law” is the law of Moses, but the law in “no law” is not referring to the law of Moses. It can’t be because we know that sin was counted prior to the law of Moses.

So what law then is Paul referring to when he says that sin is not counted when there is no law? This is the point where we need to go back to Romans 4:15 and recall what we said about that verse.

Romans 4:15 — For the law brings wrath, but where there is **no law** there is no transgression.

When we looked at Romans 4:15, we concluded that Paul’s statement, “where there is no law there is no transgression,” refers to the system of faith as opposed to a system that demands flawless conduct. Paul makes that same contrast in Galatians 3:12 when he says, “the law is not of faith.” In Galatians, Paul refers to law as “not faith,” and in Romans 4:15, he refers to faith as “no law.”

Paul is not saying that Christians are under no law — we are under the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21). Instead, Paul is saying that under the system of faith, our sins do not automatically disqualify us from justification. Our flawed conduct is not a transgression of a system that does not demand flawless conduct. “Where there is no law there is no transgression.”

I think Paul is saying something similar here at the end of verse 13 — “sin is not counted where there is no law.” That is, sin is not counted under a system based on faith. And, of course, for that to be true, you must be under that system of faith. You must be a faithful child of God.

If you are not under that system of faith, then you are under a system of law that demands flawless obedience to the law. Those are the only two systems — a system based on law and a system based on faith. And given that we are all law-breakers, the only system that opens a door to God is the system of faith. The door to God through a system of law is forever closed to lawbreakers.

So, if that is the explanation, what then is verse 13 saying? Here again is the text: “for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.”

I think we can paraphrase verse 13 this way: “for sin indeed was in the world prior to the law of Moses, but sin is not counted against those who do not live under a system based on law but who instead live under the system based on faith.”

And one reason I like that view is that it means that verse 13 is just a review — it is simply a review of what Paul has already told us about Abraham. Abraham lived prior to the law of Moses, and Abraham’s sin was not counted because he lived under a system based on faith rather than a system that demanded flawless obedience to a law.

So, perhaps the best paraphrase of verse 13 is this: “for, as I explained earlier when I told you about Abraham, sin indeed was in the world prior to the law of Moses, but sin is not counted against those who do

not live under a system based on law but who instead live under the system based on faith.”

And why is Paul reviewing what he said earlier about Abraham? He is doing that because it leads to what he says next in verse 14, which contains the key link in his argument — the link between Adam and Christ. That key point in verse 14 is where Paul is headed here in verse 13, and it explains why Paul starts with this review in verse 13.

Romans 5:14

Romans 5:14 — 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.

When we looked at death in verse 12 we concluded that it was spiritual death. Is that also true of the death in verse 14? I think it is. For starters, the context suggests that it is. Paul was talking about spiritual death in verse 12, so that suggests this death two verses later is also spiritual death.

But there is another reason. This death in verse 14 is tied to the sins of those who are dying rather than to the sin of Adam. In fact, Paul goes out of his way in this verse to tell us that their sin was **not** like Adam’s sin. That is very different from what Calvin tells us.

As we saw earlier, physical death is due to Adam’s sin (Genesis 3:19), but spiritual death is due to my sin (Romans 5:12). Yes, spiritual death of a person can be traced back to Adam’s sin (the next verse will tell us that), but that spiritual death does not occur until that person sins

(verse 12 told us that). So I think the death here in verse 14 is spiritual death.

What then does verse 14 tell us about spiritual death? First, it tells us that “death reigned from Adam to Moses.” What does that mean?

First, let’s note something about that word “reign.” It is definitely a key word in Romans 5. If you look at the Handout for Lesson 52, you can see the word “reign” highlighted in pink in verse 14, and then you can see it four more times in the following verses. We see the reign of death in verses 14 and 17; we see the reign of Christians in verse 17; we see the reign of sin in verse 21; and we see the reign of grace in verse 21.

What does it mean for something or someone to reign? The meaning of the Greek word is clear — it means to rule as king. The word means to exercise dominion over something. If something or someone reigns over us, then we are expected to obey that something or that someone — and we can expect consequences if we do not. Perhaps the best way to explain the word is to jump ahead for a moment to Romans 6.

Romans 6:12 — Let not sin therefore **reign** in your mortal body, to make you **obey** its passions.

Sin reigns, and we obey. That is how dominion works. Now, we may have a good king, and we may be happy to obey that good king. Or we may have a bad king, and we may not want to obey that bad king. But, again, there are consequences when we fail to obey something or someone who has dominion over us. That is what the word “reign” means.

So, back to Romans 5. What does it mean here in verse 14 when Paul says that “death reigned from Adam to Moses”? We now know exactly what that means. It means that death, which we have said is spiritual death, exercised dominion over those who lived from Adam to Moses. Death had a ruling power over mankind. After Adam opened the door, death entered and sat down on the throne. Death reigned as king.

But what does that mean? Well, just think back to what Paul has already told us. Back in Romans 2:12, Paul told us that “all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law.” And, of course, that covered everyone prior to Moses. And then, in Romans 3:23, Paul told us that “all have sinned.” So, when we put those verses together, they tell us that everyone prior to Moses sinned and therefore would perish absent something being done to save them from that fate, which is the possibility Paul mentions in the next verse, Romans 3:24. But that possibility depends on Jesus, and Jesus had not yet come in this time period between Adam and Moses.

The only way to describe that situation is by saying that death was having a field day! Death was in charge. Death was sitting on the throne. Death was exercising dominion over everyone. They were born, eventually they would all sin, and so they would all perish — they would all die spiritually. Death was not just their grim reaper; death was their grim king! (Unless something was done about it.)

But was that true even of Abraham? Yes, it was. We know that Abraham was a man of great faith, and we know that his faith was counted to him as righteousness. But we also know that Abraham’s sins were cleansed by the blood of Christ, which means that Abraham’s sins were not cleansed until the death of Christ. We talked all about that when we looked at Romans 3:25.

Had the reign of death not come to an end, Abraham would have died spiritually just like everyone else who ever sinned. Fortunately for Abraham and fortunately for us, there was a great reversal in kingdom, as Paul will soon tell us.

But first, let's keep looking at verse 14. What does Paul mean by the next thing he says here? "Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, **even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam.**"

What does that mean? I think what it means is that Adam had a lot more in common with Moses than he did with most everyone else who lived prior to Moses. And why is that? That is because Adam, like Moses, was given specific commands by God to follow.

Adam did not have to rely on some vague work of the law written on his heart as we saw in Romans 2:14. Instead, God had spoken directly to Adam and had told him what he must not do. But then Adam did it. Adam disobeyed a specific law that he had received directly from God. And, again, that is similar to Moses, who also received a specific law directly from God — and who also broke it.