

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>The Nicene Creed</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>	<b>38</b>		Gary L.W. Johnson
<b>Text:</b>	<b>Romans 5:12-21</b>		
<b>Date:</b>	<b>February 2, 2025 (a.m.)</b>		

### CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN FOR OUR SALVATION (Part II)

What is salvation? The theological term soteriology (from the Greek words *sōtēria* and *logos*) means the doctrine of salvation. Robert Reymond helpfully explains that “The Scriptures speak of salvation in all three time tenses:

1. The past tense: the Christian has been saved from the guilt and penalty of sin (Luke 19:9) – ‘Today salvation *has come* [*egeneto*] to this house;’ Eph. 2:8 – ‘For by grace *you have been saved* [*este sesōmenoi*] through faith;’ 2 Tim. 1:9 – ‘[God] *has saved* [*sōsantos*] us;’ Titus 3:5 – ‘according to his mercy *he saved* [*esōsen*] us;’
2. The present tense: the Christian is being saved from the power of sin 1 Cor. 1:18 – ‘to us who *are being saved* [*sōzomenois*] [the cross] is the power of God;’ 1 Cor. 15:2 – ‘by which *you are being saved* [*sōzesthe*];’ 2 Cor. 2:15 – ‘because we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who *are being saved* [*sōzomenois*],’ and
3. The future tense: the Christian will be completely saved someday from the very presence of sin (see Rom. 5:9, 10 – ‘*we shall be saved* [*sōthēsometha*] through him from the Wrath;’ 13:11 – ‘*he shall be saved* [*sōthēsetai*], but as through fire;’ 1 Thess. 5:18 – ‘having put on . . . as a helmet, the hope of salvation;’ 1 Pet. 1:5 – ‘kept by the power of God through faith for the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time).’”<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever been asked by a stranger, “Are you saved?” Many Christians use this question as an opportunity to tell someone Jesus. But a common response to that question might catch us off guard: “Saved from what?” Until this essential question can be answered, we won’t be able to make sense of Christ’s sacrifice or explain it to others. In *Saved from What?*, the late R. C. Sproul reveals that the greatest danger we face is the holy wrath of God against our sin. But the glory of the gospel is that the One from whom we need to be saved is the very One who saves us. As we better understand the severity of our sin and the sufficiency of Christ’s atonement, the truth of God’s grace will deepen our worship and drive us to make His salvation known.<sup>2</sup> Synonyms for salvation would include *deliverance* and *rescue*. “It is this concept of rescue,” writes Eryl Davies, “which underlines much of what the Bible says about the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. He died in order to rescue us. We were unable to rescue ourselves from the power and punishment of our own sin, but *Christ died for the ungodly . . . God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Rom. 5:6, 8). One Greek word for *rescue* is used in Galatians 1:4 to describe the purpose of the Saviour’s sacrifice on the cross: *who gave himself for our sins to rescue us*. This term implies great danger as well as the inability of the people concerned to escape from the danger by their own efforts. On the cross, therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ achieved a special rescue operation and one which it was impossible for any human or angel to accomplish. The same idea of rescue occurs again in 1 Thessalonians 1:10: . . . *Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath*. Only believers are rescued from God’s anger, but notice that it is the Lord Jesus *alone* who rescues us from this *coming wrath*.<sup>3</sup>

Sociologist Alan Wolfe's book *the Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (Free Press) is a stinging indictment of modern-day evangelicalism, which he refers to as "toothless evangelicalism" because it has ignored its theological heritage, turned the Bible into a self-help manual for psychological well-being, redefined morality and adopted a privatized spirituality that lacks substance and courage. We have, as a society, been thoroughly "psychologized." Take for example the widespread use of the term "addiction." *Addiction* is a proliferous term that is used to describe practically everything – drug users, alcoholics, gamblers, eating disorders, sports fans, and on and on this list goes. In fact, given our cultural tendency to describe ourselves psychologically, this kind of language has become the *lingua franca* in America today.<sup>4</sup> Marshall Shelley, editor of the evangelical journal *Leadership*, laments how this has impacted evangelicalism: "You simply can't be a part of a church these days without having learned a new language about addictions, abuse, dependencies, co-dependencies, dysfunctional families, enablers, family of origin, re-parenting, unconditional acceptance, [and] adult children."<sup>5</sup> G. A. Pritchard, in documenting the quagmire of psychology that so much of popular evangelicalism has fallen into, writes, "The penetration of this psychological worldview has shaped evangelicalism profoundly. There are now recovery Bibles, twelve-step evangelical programs, psycho-evangelical bestsellers, and burgeoning evangelical mental health industry. In short, the modern psychological worldview is molding evangelicalism in significant ways: Many evangelicals are thinking with its categories and priorities. . . . What is most curious about the influence of the psychological worldview is that few evangelicals are alarmed by it or even aware of it."<sup>6</sup> Another noted cultural observer, Philip Rieff, in his landmark study argues that the modern commitment to *the gospel of self-fulfillment* represents a profound break with, rather than reformulation of, historic faiths, specifically Judaism and Christianity. "All attempts at connecting the doctrines of psychotherapy with the old faiths," warns Rieff, "are patently misconceived."<sup>7</sup> K. H. Sargeant perceptively points out, "One reason for the success of seeker churches is that they have tapped into many American's resonance's with both traditional religious language *and* therapeutic understandings. Although some might argue that traditional religious language and therapeutic rationales involve very different, even contradictory, forms of moral discourse, what matters to most people is not so much whether their beliefs are somehow logically consistent but whether they are coherent in a personally meaningful way."<sup>8</sup>

What does this have to do with our text? Quite a bit actually. If we read the Bible through the lenses of our cultural addiction to therapeutic understanding of self, we will end up with a completely different understanding of the self, we will end up with a completely different understanding of justification (and sanctification as well), than that which the Apostle intended. This is particularly true when it comes to the doctrine of sin. Without a real knowledge of the true nature and character of sin, there can be no true understanding of Biblical evangelism. Until we know what sin really is, we will not be greatly concerned about it in our lives. And in order to understand the biblical picture of sin we cannot ignore the doctrine of original sin. The historicity of Adam is taken for granted by Paul and is essential to his whole argument in Romans 5:12-21. This is an embarrassment to those who jettison the Genesis account of the creation of human beings in favour of an evolutionary theory. According to the biblical record, Adam stands at the head of the human race in two senses. He is, in the first place, the natural head of the race. We are all descended from him. All the races of the world are ultimately of one stock as Paul reminds the Athenians (Acts 17:26). Adam also stands in a representative position as head of humanity. This is the point that Paul stresses in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22. The whole of humanity is bound up with the sin of Adam. All sinned "in Adam." Adam was appointed by God as our federal, or representative, head, so that his original sin is placed to our account. All of us sinned in and with him, so that when he fell, we fell. We all stand guilty and condemned "in Adam." This solidarity between Adam and the whole human race in sin and death is something which many find unacceptable today. Having a Western individualistic mentality we have difficulties with the idea of a corporate relationship to a person of the past. Furthermore, to suggest that we today are guilty and condemned for an act at the beginning of history by one man is regarded as grossly unfair, fatalistic, and a failure to treat people as morally responsible for their own actions. It is not fatalistic, however, nor does it treat people as morally irresponsible. The fact that we are born with a corrupt and sinful nature does not mean that we are not responsible for our actions (Mark

7:21). We constantly commit sin from our earliest days by not doing what we ought to do and by doing what we ought not to do. For these personal transgressions and failures we are responsible before God. It is because of our present privatistic view of life that our solidarity with Adam is regarded as unfair. To human reason it may be thought offensive, but is such a reaction so surprising, given our natural dislike of the Bible's general estimate of our sinful condition? Have we such a high opinion of ourselves to think that if we were in Adam's position we would have handled the situation differently? Unless we appreciate our position by nature in Adam, we shall not see the significance of the representative nature of Christ and His activity for all those who belong to Him. Lose the truth concerning the historical Adam and our solidarity in his sin and condemnation, and a further hole is made in the gospel of justification.<sup>9</sup>

"The biblical doctrine of sin," observes J. I. Packer, "has been secularized in modern times. People today still talk of sin but no longer think of it theologically. The word has ceased to convey the thought of an offence against God, and now signifies only a breach of accepted standards of decency, particularly in sexual matters. But when the Bible speaks of sin, it means precisely an offence against God. Though sin is committed by man, and often against society, it cannot properly be defined in terms of either man or society. We shall never know what sin really is till we learn to think of it in terms of our relationship with God."<sup>10</sup>

One of the great theological words is the word *imputation*. It means *to think* (cf. Rom. 2:3), *to count* (4:3), and *to reckon* (6:11), or perhaps we should say more accurately, that the verb *to impute* means those things. The Greek verb *logidsomai* and the Hebrew verb *chashab*, which underlie the English words in the English translations, mean essentially the same thing (cf. Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3, 6). There are three great acts of imputation in the Bible. They are these: (1) First, the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, or to the whole race of men (cf. 1 Cor. 15:21-22). (2) Second, there is the imputation of the sin of the elect to Jesus Christ, who bore that sin's penalty in His death upon the cross (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). (3) Third, the imputation of the righteousness of God to the elect (cf. Rom. 3:24-26; 4:1-8). It is to the first of these imputations that the passage in Romans 5:12 refers. In it Paul offers an important interpretation of the sin of Adam, one that is fundamental for all theology. Man *does* evil, Paul would say, because he *is* evil, and the root cause of the problem is what happened centuries ago in that beautiful garden planted by God. That is the subject of the text that we study in this message.

## I. **THE ORIGIN OF HUMAN SIN AND DEATH.**

- A. **The source.** (Rom. 5:12a). The apostle opens the discussion by the statement, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin . . ." And the first question the reader should have is, "What is the connection between verses 12 through 21 and verse 1 through 11? Paul's connecting phrase, *dia touto* (AV, "wherefore"), is causal and is to be rendered by *for this cause*. We shall by-pass the discussion of the meaning of the phrase and simply state the conclusion from my own study of the matter. Paul appears to me to be saying: For there exists this likeness between Christ and Adam, as the world was introduced to sin and death by the first Adam, so it has been introduced to righteousness and life by the last Adam. Sin, condemnation, and death are by our spiritual progenitor, Jesus Christ. "The master-thought of the whole passage," Gifford believes, "is that unity of *the many in the one*, which forms the point of comparison between Adam and Christ."<sup>11</sup> So, if one should ask, "How by the well-doing of *one*, Jesus Christ, are the many saved?" it may be said, in reply, "How by the disobedience of *one*, Adam, were the many condemned?" The picture is not that of solidarity, then, but of contrastive solidarity. The apostle writes that the origination of human sin is to be traced to "one man." Paul alludes, of course, to the fall in the Garden of Eden. There, after the creation of Adam and Eve, God placed them and gave the terms of the probation to Adam, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17). The tree was not the

symbol of the sex act, as some have contended, nor was it symbolic of wine. It was a test of man's creature-hood, for the condition hinged upon man's belief in the Word of God. And, of course, it was not provocation on God's part, for the maximum of freedom was permitted man and the minimum was forbidden. Nevertheless, sin came and man fell. Adam became the instrumental cause by which sin entered the world.

- B. **The fact** (Gen. 5:12a). The apostle writes, "sin entered." The sin of Adam in one sense was an irrational act, for no explanation of sin can be given that makes it reasonable. In this instance it arose in the heart of Adam as an inclination to take the fruit from the hand of his wife. At the moment that the inclination began, Adam sinned. The action that followed is the completion of the inclination. Adam, it is to be noted, wanted the one thing that was forbidden him. Like a little child, who has all the toys but one, and yet tries to get that one from his playmate, so Adam, the big child, acted childishly and evilly by desiring the fruit from the tree in the midst of the garden. The apostle's use of the word, "entered," should be noted, too. The word, which looks at the fall by its tense, suggests that sin was in existence in the universe before the fall (cf. 1 Tim. 2:14). Paul gives us no details of that fact, although there are some hints in other parts of the Scripture that seem to say that sin began in heaven with the sin of Lucifer (cf. John 8:44; Ezek. 28:11-19; Isa. 14:12-17). At any rate, Adam's sin was the original human sin, so far as the devastating results for the human race are concerned.
- C. **The result** (Gen 5:12a). The catastrophic result of the first human sin is stated in the words, "and death by sin." The fact that sin is said to be the basis of universal death strongly implies that Adam's sin has produced universal sin. The clause, "and death by sin," clearly teaches that death is a penal evil and, as Hodge points out, "not a consequence of the original constitution of man."<sup>12</sup> That which was implied in 1 Cor. 15:21-22 is here stated plainly. While Chrysostom, Augustine, and Meyer regarded the death here as physical, the greater number of commentators regard it as both physical (cf. 5:14; Gen. 3:9) and spiritual (cf. 5:18; 21; 6:23: here the death is contrasted with the spiritual life, for Paul writes, "eternal life").

**CONCLUSION:** To sum up, when Adam sinned, he died spiritually immediately. In Adam's case, he was brought to faith and thus escaped the eternal effects of spiritual death. He did not, however, escape the effects of physical death, and he eventually died physically. When the unbelieving man dies, he dies physically, for he was already dead spiritually. Thus, spiritual death leads to physical death, and if salvation does not come, then that spiritual death, which leads to physical death, is prolonged to eternal death. The three aspects of death, then, are spiritual, physical, and eternal. The remedies of death are set forth in the Word of God also. The remedy for spiritual death is eternal life, the gift of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the suffering and crucified Savior."<sup>13</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> R. L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith* (Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 796.

<sup>2</sup> <https://store.ligonier.org/saved-from-what-epub>. G. O'Collins and D. Kendall, two Roman Catholic theologians, ask, "How should theologians appropriate the scriptures in tackling the questions: What are we saved *from* and *for*? How should the salvific role of Christ be best described? What does he do as Savior or Redeemer? What is the salvation, redemption, or atonement (the terms are practically interchangeable) that he brings? There are questions that theologians want to wrestle with when they take up the issue of Christ's redemptive role." *The Bible For Theology: Ten Principles for The Theological Use of Scripture* (Paulist Press, 1997), p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> Eryl Davies, *The Ultimate Rescue: Christ's Saving Work on The Cross* (Evangelical Press, 1995), p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Martin B. Copenhaver, Anthony B. Robinson and William H. Willimon (all of whom do not come from traditions that are generally recognized as being *evangelical*) express the same concern: "We, who have become so adept at describing our lives psychologically, economically, sociology, must now work to describe ourselves theologically. It's like we have lost a language for having anything more interesting happen to us than a personal crisis. We have been so thoroughly schooled in atheistic descriptions of ourselves that, when God in Christ intrudes among us, we have no means to name revelation when we get it. Having lost a language of faith, we lack the resources and the imagination to think of life as anything more than chance, meaningless urges and counter-urges, one thing after another." *Good News in Exile: Three Pastors Offer a Hopeful Vision for the Church*, (Eerdmans, 1999), p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> As cited in G. A. Pritchard's *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Baker, 1996), p. 225.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> As cited in K. H. Sargeant, *Seeker Churches: Promoting Traditional Religion in a Nontraditional Way* (Rutgers Univ. Press, 2000), p. 103.

<sup>8</sup> Sargeant, p. 45.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Eveson, *The Great Exchange: Justification by Faith Alone in the Light of Recent Thought* (Day One Publications, 1996), p. 187.

<sup>10</sup> J. I. Packer, *God's Words: Studies of Key Bible Themes* (IVP, 1981), p. 72.

<sup>11</sup> E. H. Gifford, *the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (rpt. James Family, 1977), p. 75.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans* (rpt. The Banner of Truth, 1972), p. 145.

<sup>13</sup> I am indebted to the late Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, my former professor of Theology for the substance of this analysis. His article: "Romans 5:12 – An Exercise in Exegesis and Theology" in R. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney eds. *New Dimensions in New Testament Study* was described by D. A. Carson as the finest exegetical study he had ever read.