

For those of us who were here last week... and got to hear Harvey preach... we were treated to a great illustration about Adam's first sin... and death coming upon mankind. Harvey had us imagine what it must have been like... when Adam and Eve first began to feel the effect of death for the first time. Never before had a single cell on their bodies - died. ... Now suddenly they had all sorts of body odor... because body cells would now die. Decay inside their mouth unexpectedly produced a strange new odor... "*Pee-ewe!... Get away from me!*"

Today... our passage in Romans takes us back to the initial sin... in the Garden of Eden... when death entered the world. We are going to force ourselves to think about this *carefully-avoided-subject* – death – especially in the manner that 1 Corinthians 15:26 treats it. There... Paul refers to it as "*the last enemy to be destroyed.*"

I want us to see what the Bible means when it says that. ... Folks... let's talk about this "enemy" of ours... (death)... for just a moment. ... Death really **is** your enemy — an enemy that is coming after you. ... It usually takes each of us a while to realize this.

One of my seminary professors (Dr. Don Sunukjian)... explains it this way: For the first twenty or thirty years of our life... we never think about it. ... Every year we get stronger and stronger... and smarter and smarter. We get more competent in our jobs. The *fullness-of-life* is ahead of us. ... Death is an unreal concept. We never think about it. ... But somewhere in our mid-thirties... we get a little hint that "death **is** our enemy"... (that death is after us.)

The realization that death is coming after you... might come about because of something as simple as playing in a softball game... at a church picnic. There's a fly ball hit to right field... which is territory... that you are to prevent any ball from touching its turf. ... You immediately lower your body... while pivoting toward the anticipated spot where the ball is headed. Your arm and glove are stretched out as you run... You're gonna grab that ball... just like you did so often – 15 years ago... and maybe even showcase some style by throwing it to second base... as if you'd put a runner out... who was trying to advance from first base. ... But to your utter amazement... the ball goes three inches past your glove into the open space behind you. ... *What? How did that happen? I always get those pop-ups with-in 20 feet around me. How did I miss that one?* ... Ah! Your mind wrote a check your body couldn't cash. ... You've slowed a step and now have a funny little leg cramp.

Or maybe the hint comes when you look in the mirror and see the lines in your face... a little thinning... or greying in your hair... flabby skin under your biceps... or age spots on the back of your hand.

Or maybe it sinks-in when you watch your parents die. When they're no more a part of your world... you suddenly begin to realize that your time (too) will come.

At some point... (for various reasons)... a troubling thought begins to nag at the corners of your mind: *I am going to die, too. I only have so many years left, and then I will be no more.*

Most people (especially unbelievers) can't cope with this realization. It's too much to handle... so they just don't think about it. ... They put it out of their minds. They go on as if it's never going to happen. ... *Ignoring it* is a nice strategy... but it doesn't seem to do much good.

Others try to cope with the thought of death through humor. They joke about it... so that it doesn't get too near them. ... Woody Allen has a well-known line (for example)... that says... "*I'm not afraid of dying, I just don't want to be there when it happens.*" ... Some folks use humor to block out the thought of death or blunt the reality of it.

And then there are some... (I am sure you have noticed)... who look death in the face and try to fight it. They meet it head on... and dare it - *to do its worst.* ... It's the 80-year-old who's determined to keep up with the rest of the hikers... no matter how *high* (or how *far*) they're going. ... It's the 80-year-old who will grab the heaviest suitcase to unload the car. ... It's the 90-year-old who gets down on the floor to play Legos with his great-grandchildren. ... These folks will never give in... never quit... never retire.

But regardless of how we react to death — whether ignore it... put it off with humor... or fight it — it remains a relentless... inevitable enemy. It keeps coming closer and closer... until finally it wins. Ultimately we have no power against it.

Why do we have such a relentless... unstoppable... unbeatable enemy? What did we do to deserve this? The Bible says it's because of sin — Death became our enemy when Adam sinned. When Adam sinned... death entered his own body (as well as the whole human race... who existed in

his genes... and would be born thereafter.) ... Ever since Adam... we have shared his sinful DNA. ... We have been born with an inclination to sin... and we have acted on that inclination again and again.

(You see...) each of us is the center of our respective universes... usurping the place that only **God** should occupy. More than one person has observed that the letter 'I' is the center of the word 'sin'. ... This 'I'-centeredness is both Adam's great Sin - and everyone who has ever been born since.

We knowingly... freely and willingly usurp God's place... and... (resolve as we might from time to time)... we prove to be unwilling to remove ourselves from the center. ... In the final analysis... self is unwilling to step down from the throne... and put God in his rightful place. ... Particular sins (which vary from person to person)... flow from that great sin. When we face God as judge... it will not be possible to blame Adam... or our more immediate parents for this.

This is why the inescapable consequence of death is in our path... ready to swallow us.

This is the point of the opening verses of our text in Romans 5 today: death has entered the human race through Adam... and because we share his sinful DNA... we suffer the same consequence. We are now powerless against a relentless... unstoppable... inescapable... universal death.

But our passage also declares the good news that someone has stepped in front of us to destroy this seemingly unstoppable enemy. ... That is the

second thing we will look at today: the destruction of this last enemy – death! ... But it is really the third element that our passage deals with... where I want to make most of our application from our passage today. The last two verses are about - our reigning with Christ.

I will be following Dr. Kent Hughes outline for today's passage. Though this is not a perfect outline... the flow of the passage follows this general current:

- I. The Ruin of Mankind (Romans 5:12-14)
- II. The Rescue of Mankind (Romans 5:15-16)
- III. The Reign of Mankind (Romans 5:17-21)

There is a very positive progression here. The passage begins in the abyss with man's sin and death... (or his "ruin.") Then it ascends through his rescue... and on to the pinnacle - of his reign.

As believers we are intended to reign. But the truth is... many of us are not really reigning. I will say more about this when we come to our final two verses. ... Right now... we will turn our attention to the first section of our passage – The RUIN of mankind...

Romans 5:12-14

The ruin that Paul describes is (of course) the fall of Adam... as recorded in Genesis chapters 2 and 3. ... In Genesis 2:17 God gave the prohibition... "you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... for when you eat of it you will surely die." ... But they went ahead anyway and sinned. The result... Paul tells us... is that sin and death spread to all men.

(The idea is... that all of us sinned... in that simple completed act.) So we all have an Adam-solidarity. We all are in the same boat.

We should stop here and take note that this idea is not easy for us to understand (or accept) ... because of our modern tendency toward "me—me—me." ("I am the center of my universe!") ... Our highly-valued "individualism" makes many reject... (with little thought)... the idea that we could possibly share in Adam's sin.

Our 21st Century Western Culture has left us with assumptions about "*the way the world works*" that are very different from those of the Bible writers. Paul's teaching about the corporate significance of Adam and Christ is a classic instance of this culture clash.

Those of us who have been raised in the Western world are heirs of an individualistic tradition. As one who has grown up in the United States... I have had drilled into me since birth the "*rugged individualism*" of my culture. My choices... I have been taught (both explicitly and implicitly) determine who I will be... what I will do... and how successful I will be.

The Bible certainly does not deny individual responsibility. But it also has a much stronger sense of how people are related to one another... in ways that mean the decision of one... can affect many others.

The classic example in the Old Testament is the sin of Achan (Josh. 7). Contrary to God's command... Achan kept for himself some of the spoils from the battle of Jericho. ... When the Israelites then tried to take the city of Ai... they were defeated. Lives (of God's people) were lost. Why? ... Because one man (**Achan**) had sinned (7:20) !

There is a term for what we see in this. It is called “*corporate solidarity*” and it is an **important** part of the way both Old and New Testament authors looked at the world. ... But even in the West... in recent years with the rise of “Post-Modernism”... America’s individualistic tradition is being challenged. Our culture is shifting to the view that our apparently “free” choices are - in fact - dictated by our upbringing... background... and environment.

But we still have difficulty with the idea that someone else’s decision or act might decisively affect us. ... Yet Paul’s argument here (and in several other places in Romans) assumes this truth.

But since our text today brings this topic to our attention... let me challenge you with (what may be) a difficult truth for our 21st Century Individualistic mindsets to process. (God’s Word needs to stretch us... and break up hard soil in our hearts... doesn’t it.) ... So here is a challenging thought about the Biblical idea of “corporate solidarity”:

The whole analogy of the church being “*the body of Christ*” assumes this truth of *corporate solidarity*. When you sin – all of us are affected... and when I sin – it affects you. There is no private sin. Your sin diminishes the effectiveness of our entire church... and my sin diminishes it. When one part of the body hurts – we all hurt. ... And we are much less of a church – if we do not operate according to the principle of corporate solidarity.

We don’t have to understand it completely ... or agree with its fairness – (“*why should I be punished for something that Adam did...?*”) ... But it is a truth that is clearly taught throughout Scripture.

Oh! And by the way... as to our suffering for the sin that Adam committed... let me just say... that if God had placed any one of us in Adam's place... WE WOULD HAVE DONE THE SAME THING ! And if God had tested every single human separately (on their own) I have no doubt that the result would be the same – disobedience.

Before we move on... I would like for you to look at verses 13 again with me...

Romans 5:13

Many have wondered... *what-in-the-world* Paul meant... when he wrote: “*sin is not counted where there is no law.*” ... Does he mean that before Moses came... nobody’s sin will be noticed by God...? No. It can’t mean that! Because verse 14 immediately follows.

Romans 5:14

Sin sure is being noticed by God before Moses came and gave the law. – It was being punished by death! So *what-in-the-world* did Paul mean by: “*sin is not counted where there is no law*”?

Paul means that sin does not seem to be important to man...when God's Law is absent... ... This is not a statement about God's point of view – it is about man's understanding of his own sinful behavior. The Law makes sin apparent and sharply defined to him.

From my Junior High years... through nearly all of my college years... I lived for the thrill of playing practical jokes on people. I loved seeing the wide-eyed reaction on people’s faces... or looks of total embarrassment

(and often - humiliation.) I did not see any harm. (I did not count it as sin)
... I was just having fun.

But during my last year of college... I attended a large Campus Crusade for Christ conference in San Jose. During one of the meetings in a large conference hall... we were all sitting in chairs... like what we have in this auditorium (only hundreds more.) I slid underneath the seats in front of me... while the speaker was teaching... and carefully untied a friend's shoelaces. And then I tied his laces to the legs of the chair he was sitting in. Then I sat back in my own chair and waited for the conference session to end. Well... you know what happened. He got up to leave and immediately fell on his face... with his chair falling on top of his back.

I thought it was hilarious at the time. But someone that I admired... whose opinion I really cared about... was furious with me. By the time she finished with me... I counted my sin. Never before had I realized just how wrong it is to laugh at someone else's misfortune of being humiliated by my pranks. Until that time... my transgression was not fully seen... but now it was sharply defined and accounted. This is what the Law does.

Sin ruins mankind. But Praise God - there is a rescue for mankind...

Romans 5:15-16

Just as the human race was condemned through one man (Adam)... God was able to save the human race through one Man (Jesus Christ)! Suddenly this whole idea of "corporate solidarity" doesn't seem so bad... does it...? Now... we can all be thankful for this principle! ... But if it is not

true about Adam... neither is it true about Christ. (Or let me put it this way: because the first is true... the second is also.)

The analogy of Adam and Christ is an analogy of opposites. ... Because of Adam's sin... all men are condemned. ... Because of Christ's obedience... many are pardoned. But Adam is only analogous to Christ... in that one man affected countless others.

We have "much more" in Christ. Today we are looking forward to something more wonderful than the Garden of Eden. ... Christ gives to man far more than he lost in Adam—more indeed than Adam ever had! The blessing that comes from Christ is infinitely greater. ... As the writer of Hebrews tells us... right after listing his Hall of Faith (naming many of our Bible Heroes) :

Hebrews 11:13 (ESV)

¹³ *These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.*

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Verse 16 teaches us two important truths. #1. God hates sin so much... that it only took one sin to condemn the entire human race... and separate us from Him. Folks! We often want to think of our sin as much less than it really is... more along the lines of a little mistake that we commit sometimes. ... But truthfully... it is not what we want to think that it is.

It is actually insurrection of the worst kind. It is no less than the high crime of treason against God. Every time we sin... we turn away and reject the

creator God of the Universe... the Supreme Being. This is an ultimate offense that deserves the ultimate punishment.

The second vital truth in verse 16 is this: “Greater than God’s hatred of sin – is His love for the sinner!

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Now we come to the apex of our passage. Notice how many times the word “reign” or “reigned” comes up in the final verses. We are ready now to talk about “The REIGN of mankind.”

Romans 5:17-21

Look at the end of verse 17.... ... “*To reign in life through Christ*”... means *that in the power and protection of Jesus... we can overcome temptation.*

1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

¹³ *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

(LISTEN!)... In the power and protection of Christ... we are no longer victims... but victors!

1 Corinthians 15:57 (ESV)

⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Have you been living more like a victim... or a victor... in regard to the sin that plagues your life...? ... What about the little frustrations of life (let's not

even consider big challenges...) Do you often complain when obstacles block your path...?

Philippians 2:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

(LISTEN!) In the power and protection of Christ... we can do a lot less complaining... can't we...? ... (Are we victims... or victors...?) ... May God make us all to live far more as victors than as victims. And if God is (right now) showing you that He wants you to change... let me show you some tremendous hope.

Romans 5:20

God's Law... His revealed will concerning His desire... (expressed in Philippians 2:14-15) has just revealed to some of us... that we need to stop complaining so much... and start living more as victors. ... A greater sense of sin and guilt may be happening inside some of us right now... but God's grace abounds to a greater degree ! No matter how great our sin — in quantity or depth... God's grace super-abounds to us – no matter what your sin is! ... No one is beyond the grace of Christ.

Knowing that God loves us... allowing His affection to permeate every corner of our lives... we will reign in life... to His glory.

So... practically... how can it happen... for anyone believer or unbeliever who is not reigning to start reigning...?

We need... first... to review *the greatness of our ruin*. ... This is where we must always begin. ... This is why Christ so completely undressed mankind in the Beatitudes. ... Before we can reign... we must be brought low.

"*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*" said Jesus (Matthew 5:3). Our solidarity with Adam and the rest of humanity in sin... must be echoed in purposeful thinking. ... We need to see that all our existence is colored by sin. And our ruin in Adam is so great... there is no human remedy. ... We need to have a deep comprehension of the reality of sin and death.

Having reviewed our ruin... we need next to review *the greatness of our rescue*. ...The profound contemplation of our ruin and our rescue can restore us so we will *reign* properly. ... At the risk of making this too simple... I believe this can all be summed up in one word—*LOVE*. Our healing and subsequent reign in life comes as we contemplate and receive God's love.

As we close today... I want to take you back to the scene of the Garden of Eden... just after Adam had sinned. ... In his commentary... Chuck Swindoll ties-up the verses of our passage today in this way:

God's answer to Adam's sin could have been swift and severe. ... He could have spoken the universe out of existence as easily as He had created it... and He would have been no less holy to do so. ... In fact... many philosophers question how a good... all-powerful God can tolerate the presence of evil. ... The answer is grace.

The Lord... moved by love... confronted Adam with his sin. ... His first question, "*Where are you?*" is rhetorical. ... It was a bold invitation to come out of hiding.

Through God's revealed Word (the Law)... His wrath blows into our garden... and boldly urges us to come out of hiding. ... We are right to fear His wrath... but foolish to distrust His grace. ... After all... if His chief desire were to execute the just penalty of sin... He would have done that already.

So... UNBELIEVER you have a choice. ... Guilt or grace? You may have either. ... You can remain in hiding... cling to your guilt... and suffer the inevitable judgment for your sin — eternal... agonizing separation from God. ... Or... you can stop hiding... stand before Him... acknowledge your sin... admit you are helpless to please Him on your own... and receive His free gift of grace.

His gift is free... extended by grace and received through faith. ... So... the choice is yours. ... Guilt or grace?

... BELIEVER... Victim or Victor? ... the choice is yours as well.