

Romans 5:12-21 - Who are you?

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Date: 30 November 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning everyone, I'm going to read our Bible passage, which is from Romans chapter 5, and we're going to start at verse 12 and it's on page 1132.

So Romans 5, and I'll start from verse 12 to the end of the chapter. Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people because all sinned.

To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many.

Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin. The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.

[1 : 3 1] For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ?

For if, by the trespass, the one man, the trespass, the one man, the many will be made sinners.

The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Amen. Great. Thank you, Michael. Let's pray as we come to God's word. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we do pray and ask for your help this morning.

Lord, I'm very conscious of not just my own personal weakness, but just sort of the weakness of the moment of us just trying to sit and listen and concentrate and the things that might distract us.

[3 : 1 0] And yet, Lord, we recognize that hearing your word is the most urgent and important thing for us this morning. So please be at work by your spirit. Do us good.

Help what I say to be true and useful. And help all of us to have tender hearts to you, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

I want to start this morning with a simple question. It's a profound question, but a simple one. Who are you? Who are you? It's one of those questions, I think, as you think about it more and more, it gets harder and harder, right?

So you might go, well, I'm Steve. That's an easy question. I am Steve. But then you think, well, actually, no, I'm more than just that. I'm more than my name. I'm a husband.

I'm a father. I'm also more than my relationships as well. I don't really want to get into the weeds of all the different ways that you might identify yourself this morning, only to show you that if you keep asking that who are you question, you eventually end up at the root of it all, which is the Romans 5, 12 to 21 answer, which is something like this.

[4 : 20] I am a son or daughter of Adam. Which means simply, really, at its very root, who am I? I am part of the human race.

That regardless of whatever else I add afterwards, this is who I am. I am a son of Adam. It doesn't matter whether I'm black or white, rich or poor. It doesn't matter whether I've got PhDs and masters coming out of my ears or whether I went to the University of Life and the School of Hard Knocks.

All of us are people. Born as babies into the world, not by our own choice, not in a location that we decided, not with the circumstances that we could have designed for ourselves.

I am, you are, body, mind and spirit, a human person, living, breathing, loving and working.

And Romans 5 says that that sort of core fundamental identity that we all share, that identity, that humanity comes with a huge problem. Look at verse 12.

[5 : 24] Here it is.

My humanity, your humanity, given to us by Adam, comes with the problem of sin and death. Sin and death enter the world through him, it says.

In other words, this is our inheritance along with our identity. Our inheritance from the one man. There's no getting away from this. The Bible is really clear that Adam, whilst being an ordinary man, just like us, was unlike us by being in an extraordinary position.

So in Adam, humanity is in some senses on probation. So humanity is being put to the test in Adam. The whole fate of the human race is resting on his shoulders in the garden.

And the question is something like, will we obey? And so we're tied up with Adam. Not just kind of biologically, but morally and spiritually.

[6 : 35] He's our head, our representative. Will Adam obey and bring life to humanity? Or will he, like the fallen angels before him, reject God's right to rule and bring down with him the whole human race?

Now, this idea of representation we've thought about, haven't we, with the children earlier, where in sport an individual carries with him or her the hopes of the nation.

If they win, we win. If they lose, we lose. And it's like that in a way here. All of humanity on his shoulders. But there's an obvious distinction, isn't there? It's not a penalty kick or a game of cricket.

It's not a matter of skill with everyone, including Adam, willing himself to win. This is not really a matter of will like that. It's a matter of desire. We're told in Genesis 3 that Adam desires to be like God.

And so he eats the forbidden fruit. He desires rebellion. And so pursues it. And Adam falls. And so, verse 12, sin enters the world and death comes to all people because all sins.

[7 : 45] Or if you're looking down at your Bible, as verse 15 puts it, the many died by the trespass of the one man. Now, there's lots to say about this, right? And I know in a sense it's sort of abstract and complicated, but it is really important.

I want you to notice with me very firstly that sin and death is not a natural thing. We often talk like it is, don't we? You know, when someone screws up, we often say something like, oh, he's only human.

But screwing up is not actually essential to our humanity. We're not made like that. Adam brought that in. We weren't designed to sin, get old, and die. Rather, death itself is a kind of condemnation on humanity because of the sin of Adam.

It's why sin and death hurt so much. If you're grieving, it's why it hurts so much because death is an unnatural imposter into our life.

Verse 16 puts the judgment this way. The judgment followed one's sin and brought condemnation. So that, verse 17, death reigned through one man.

[8 : 54] To go back to the image of the sports ground, our representative lost, the penalty was missed, the match was lost, the catch was dropped. We all lost in Adam. Sin entered and we took on his status, losers, and faced with him the condemnation of those who lost.

I don't purport to be able to work out what's going on in your head right now, but maybe you're thinking, well, that seems a bit unfair, Steve. Are you saying that we are guilty in Adam outside of anything that we have done wrong?

Don't condemn me for Adam's sin. Give me a chance, God. Well, you don't get the answers to all of those questions in the passage, but Paul does say in verse 13 that our actions do matter.

He tells you that after Adam, a law was added, a law that was given by God to Moses, and that law is given for the purpose of what he calls counting sin, adding it up.

And it's that sin that we are condemned for, because it turns out we're no better than Adam, and our own actions have consequences, even if we're not in Adam's position. But still he points out, we don't need the law to condemn us, because even before Moses gave the law, people still died.

[10 : 06] Not as lawbreakers, for there is no law, but as inheritors of the guilt of Adam, enough to condemn us to death. Nevertheless, he says, verse 14, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command as Adam did, who is a pattern of the one to come.

Maybe it helps to think about it like this. Imagine, as you grow up, you can see in yourself, can't you, that the family traits, that you can't seem to get rid of, or shake.

Maybe it's the baldness of your maternal grandfather, for example. And try as you may, it comes and gets you. Maybe it's the metabolism of your father, or the eyesight of your mother, or the gray hair of your auntie.

We here then inherit, don't we, the ultimate family trait of all humanity. It's unmistakable. You see it around you all the time. It's the family trait of death.

And all of us, without exception, will die. So who am I? I am a son of Adam. And what happens to sons or daughters of Adam?

[11 : 23] We die. In condemnation for Adam's sin, and in the counting up of our own rebellion, no one has escaped.

Not a single person. Walk around a graveyard, and you will see it. No one has ever avoided the family likeness of humanity, except for one person.

Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, we're told in this passage, is born as a second Adam. He is born, as it puts it in verse 14, in the pattern of Adam. Jesus is a new representative.

Jesus is God in flesh, a real man, united in frail, broken flesh, but unique in his perfection, born of a virgin woman, but conceived by the Holy Spirit.

And this man, Jesus, did not fall into disobedience, but obediently lived his life in full submission to his father's will, even to the point of giving up his life on the cross because of the sins of his people.

[12 : 28] And because of his obedience, he was raised to a new life by the Spirit, defeating sin and death. And so this is the big point. This is the big point of Romans 5, 12 to 21. It's one of those greater to lesser arguments.

Look at verse 15. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ overflowed to the many?

Here's how this works, right? If Adam's disobedience brought death and condemnation, how much more significant do you think the obedience of the Son of God is that brings grace and forgiveness?

Look at verse 16. Nor can the gift of God be compared to the result of one man's sin. You just, they're not even in the same categories of value. The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.

Here it is there. Adam's sin brought death to the entire human race. It stained us with sin and guilt. But Jesus' obedience gifts his people with justification.

[13 : 41] It declares the guilty righteous before him through his death in their place. Think about it like this.

How easy is it to ruin a white shirt? It's dead easy, isn't it? To ruin a white shirt, all you have to do is spill your coffee, right?

Or your spag bowl, or mark it with pen or something. And the job is done, right? The shirt is ruined. It's stained. How difficult is it to remove that and to perfect a stained and ruined white shirt?

Well, it's often impossible, isn't it? It's very hard. And here's Paul's point. Adam did the easy thing. He stained humanity with his guilt. It brought death.

Jesus has done the difficult thing, the impossible thing. He, by his death in our place, bearing our sin, has made the dirty clean. What we've been thinking about for weeks now, that Jesus' death on the cross has the power to justify the sinner.

[14 : 48] That God is able to look on Christ and his work on the cross and look at you in your sin and me in my sin and say, they are perfect, they are justified, they are clean because of him.

And so here's the argument. If the lesser thing that Adam did had such significant consequences, don't you think that the greater thing that Jesus did will have even more significant consequences?

And what will those consequences be? Well, it's obvious, isn't it? If Adam's thing brings death, then Jesus' justifying obedience will bring life. Life.

Verse 18. Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

But just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. Perhaps an illustration will help us grasp this.

[15 : 50] It's a good illustration. It's not mine. It's Paul's. Verse 21. You notice there he compares sin and grace like two different kings. Yeah? Two rulers. Two kingdoms.

He uses the word reign actually over and over in the passage. So here's the image. Imagine two kingdoms. One kingdom is called death. And the kingdom of death is ruled by a king called sin.

And sin is a weak, pathetic king who reigns terribly. He is a pathetic, weak king. But even in his weakness he is capable of bringing death to all his subjects without exception.

Everybody dies. Some die young, others die old. It's of no consequence because all die. But there is then, he says, another kingdom. And it's ruled by a strong king called righteousness by grace.

And that king is more powerful than sin. So even while the weak king sin manages to inflict death on all his subjects, so the more powerful king, righteousness by grace, can give life to all his subjects.

[16 : 57] So that if you belong to his kingdom, you will live. Everybody does. The king of righteousness by grace sees to it that they do. Because the king of righteousness by grace is stronger than the king sin.

So this really is, this is the question for you and I from the passage this morning. Where do you want to live? Who do you want to be your king? Who's going to be your representative? Whose actions are going to define your destiny?

Which king is going to define your identity? Do you want Jesus to be your king and to live? Or do you want Adam to be your king and die? Which do you want? Which will it be?

Of course, the answer is obvious, isn't it? I want Jesus. I want to belong to him. I want the life that flows from his victory, not the death that flows from Adam's failure.

And that really is the passage this morning, King Jesus reigning in life to bring life to all who belong to him. As we finish, I want to draw out two lessons for us.

[17 : 59] One about our identity and one about our confidence. Let's start with identity firstly. I want you to see with me that Romans 5 tells you that being a Christian is about having a whole new identity.

I hope you can see this in the passage this morning that being a Christian in a kind of Romans 5 way is not about getting a hobby, right? It's not about taking up golf.

I don't know why you'd do that, but if you did, it's not like that. It's not like learning to knit or going to the gym. Being a Christian is not sort of tagging on something to your already established identity.

Instead, being a Christian, this is the only way that Paul is able to explain it, right? Being a Christian is as fundamental as no longer belonging to Adam but belonging to Jesus.

It's a whole new life. It's new creation. It's being born again. In other words, what has happened to us for us in Christ is the most important thing about us.

[19 : 02] Who are you? I'm a son of the living God through Jesus Christ. Now, we're not yet receiving all the benefits that we've been promised, but we know we will because Jesus is stronger than Adam.

Let's try and think about how this works with me. Imagine it like this, right? Life, in a way, is like living in a small, damp, condemned-to-destruction flat, right? The paint is peeling off the walls, the windows are broken, the front door is hanging off the hinges.

I mean, I know that's a depressing view of life, but it's kind of true, isn't it? Life is not always terribly miserable, but it is basically living in a thing that's condemned to destruction, right?

And we all know that the day is coming when the door will fall off, the damp will take over, the paint will crumble completely, and the bulldozer will move in. And it's a depressing place to live, so for the most part, we just try and ignore it.

All right, put it out of our minds. Focus on other things. Or maybe we try and fix it up. Perhaps we find a religion that offers to hang a few paintings on the walls of our condemned flat.

[20 : 12] Or maybe we find a career that offers a can of paint to paint over a few of the cracks. But still we know that it is crumbling and there's no escape and the flat is condemned. But then along comes Christ and he builds a whole new house.

It's got walk-in showers, balconies, jacuzzi bathtubs, giant bedrooms with king-sized beds. The walls never fall or crumble and he offers us the keys as a gift. Justification by faith that we've been thinking about is the handing over of the keys to the new house.

It's being liberated from the condemnation of the flat. You've not moved in yet, but we have the keys. The work has all been done. You can see the house. It's finished. It's ready. And the Christian life is the invitation to think with increasing clarity that that house is my home, not this crumbling flat.

Realizing that fundamentally that is where I belong. I have the keys already. I know that Jesus has finished the house. I'm no longer defined by the weakness and suffering of this life.

Not because I don't experience it. I do experience it. But because they're not the most important thing to me. Because I'm in Christ. I'm new creation. When Vanessa and I were first married, we had a week in a pines where they were knocking down the apartment blocks that we were staying in.

[21 : 40] So we were in one end and the bulldozer was at the other end, right? And it was Easter time and it was wet and it was damp and it was cold and it was kind of miserable. But we had a really fun time because why did we have a fun time?

Because we knew that's not where we lived. Right? That's that. We're going home to somewhere better than this where they're not knocking it down. And that's true, isn't it?

That's the Christian life. Life is tough and difficult. But God in Christ has done everything that is necessary to liberate us from sin and death. So one day we will be home.

And Christian living is increasingly seeing that as where we belong. I'm a son of my father in heaven. I'm destined to live with him.

So let me just ask you, have you understood that before about the Christian life? Have you seen what a radical thing it is to be a Christian? Or maybe you're not yet a Christian this morning and you're just thinking it through. Listen, this is what the Christian life is all about.

[22 : 44] You can go anywhere else in the world and they will offer to patch up your falling down flat for you, right? Only Christ can offer you a new home. Only Christ. New birth, new life, new creation through Christ forever.

Maybe you've been a Christian for years. It's still possible, isn't it? That you've made the Christian life a bit too small. That you've kind of tagged it onto your life and you wonder why you find the Christian life so dissatisfying. Living the Christian life as if the keys to eternal home and eternal security are not yet in your pocket.

As if being a Christian was mostly about fixing up the crumbling flesh. That's never what the Christian life was. Christian life is not a poster on the crumbling humanity of this life.

It's a whole new creation to be longed for and excited about and to live in the light of. So that's the first one, identity. Second one, confidence. I wonder just as we finish if I can invite you to think about why Paul writes this little section.

I mean, you have to admit as you read this section it is a little bit technical. I do a sermon read-through on a Friday to a few staff and other volunteers. You're welcome to come if you want to ask me. And words like heavy, dense, difficult were used to describe the passage and the sermon.

[24 : 02] You have to admit, don't you, that second Adam is not really the sort of language that we would use. You know, if someone comes to you and says, oh, tell me about what it means to be a Christian, you go, it's all about a second Adam.

You wouldn't really talk like that, would you? You know, people memorize the first half of Romans 5 but not many bother with the second half. So perhaps you think, well, maybe this is just aimed at theological geeks. And maybe I've not done a brilliant job of explaining it this morning.

It's all been a bit obscure. But if I could just ask you to think why for a moment. Why, what is Paul writing this for? Is Paul's purpose to confuse you this morning? Is that what he wants to do? I don't think it is.

Instead, I think Paul is concerned that if you don't understand the significance of Jesus, in the terms that he describes him here, you will not have appropriate confidence as a Christian. See, I think Paul here is being a brilliant pastor.

Paul knows that one of the great struggles in our Christian lives is a battle with confidence or assurance. Can I really be sure? Can I be certain? How can I know that life with God is a reality?

[25 : 04] And for some of us, we see that lack of confidence in a perpetual worry. Now, our doubt is maybe not so much is the gospel true, but is it really, is it really for me?

Does God love me? Am I saved? I'm sure I don't feel saved often. I come to church and other people feel they seem to be really emotionally engaged and I'm not.

For others of you, you see this lack of confidence in something which is like half-heartedness. You're basically living your life, hedging your bets. You know, I want to do enough to assume that if the gospel is true, I will be saved on the day that I meet the Lord Jesus, but I'm not going to do so much that it makes this life more difficult because that might be a big mistake, wouldn't it?

I might miss out. That'd be a waste. It's the same disease, it's just different symptoms. It's a lack of confidence. And so Paul writes, Romans 5, 12 to 21, to fill you and me with confidence that justification by faith is enough to bring you eternal life.

And he does it by basically asking you to compare the magnitude of two historical events. In one event, a man ate fruit as he desired to be like God.

[26 : 18] In the other historical event, God in flesh desired to show you grace and forgiveness and mercy. The man who ate the fruit died and brought death to us all.

And you know that's true because you see it all around you. The God man also died in our place and was resurrected to new life, a life of a whole different quality.

And Paul effectively holds those two historical men in front of you and says, have a think about this. Which one is more significant? Which is more seismic?

The one man's disobedience that brought death or the obedience of God the Son that brings life? What's more precious? The blood of Adam or the blood of Jesus?

The infinitely valuable blood of the God man Jesus. And the answer is obvious, isn't it? The righteous death of the Son of God in human flesh has to be more significant than the unrighteous death of a mere man.

[27 : 32] It has to be. And because that is the case, if you and I are Christians this morning, if we're believing and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, we can be as sure that we will receive eternal life as you are certain now that everybody dies.

That's how sure you can be. It's as if Paul is kind of putting his arm around us and lifting our chins and saying, listen, anxious saint, have another look at Jesus.

Have another look at the cross. Have another look at the magnitude of his obedience. Have another look at the significance of his resurrection. Take courage.

Don't despair. There is a day coming, isn't there? Where because of our connection with Adam, we will die. And where will our hope be on that day?

It will be that Jesus Christ's resurrection is even more powerful. So don't despair. There's a sense in which don't overthink your sin.

[28 : 40] Repent of your sin. Bring it to the one who loves to forgive. Don't hedge your bets. Don't try and build heaven now. Instead, look to the life ahead of you. This is the life of Christ himself because confidence comes from understanding the significance of Jesus.

Look at him. Tell your doubts. Listen, doubting hearts say. Do you know that God in human flesh died and rose again?

Did you know there's an empty grave? Take courage. Live for Jesus because he will take us home. Let me pray as we close.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Let's do this. Let's have just a few moments of quiet and we can pray in our own hearts. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that because of Jesus, we are not who we were, but we're now your sons and daughters.

We are united to Jesus Christ and to his life. We're no longer identified by Adam and his sin and death. And help us, we pray, to take courage that as sure as we are now that people die because of Adam's sin, we can be that sure that we will live because of Jesus' resurrection.

[30 : 29] I'll keep our eyes fixed on him. Pray especially this morning, maybe for people in this room, for whom death doesn't feel like a far off thing, but maybe a close by thing.

Give them great courage and confidence in Jesus' resurrection. Maybe for others in the room who have been hedging their bets. Please, Lord, fix our eyes on what Jesus has promised to us, this eternal home that will be ours through him.

And help us to live in the light of that now, we pray. In his name and for your glory. Amen. Amen. Amen.