



# ROMANS Part 41

Chapter 5:12-14

## Sin, Death—and vice-versa

**Therefore, even as through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned—for until law sin was in the world, yet sin is not being taken into account when there is no law; nevertheless death reigns from Adam unto Moses, over those also who do not sin in the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him Who is about to be.**

Here comes Paul again, writing a ridiculous, incomplete, run-on sentence. As always, however, this ridiculous, incomplete, run-on sentence is fraught with truth. That's the problem, you see. My job is making sense of it. I must sharpen my interpretative senses and pluck delicate, thin-skinned produce from a tree that ought to have been pruned with a wrecking ball.

I am so ticked off at this sentence that I am going to “Google” this verse in *The Message* and see if Eugene Peterson's paraphrase can make sense of this grammatical abortion while at the same time retaining truth. I am taking a huge chance here. Don't try this at home, kids; you could hurt yourselves and then I will get calls from your parents. I am a trained professional who takes these sorts of professional risks on a regular basis. Besides, my parents are both dead.

Here it goes—Romans 5:12-14, from *The Message*. (You forced us into this, Paul; and so did you, A.E. Knoch, for while claiming to render the *Concordant Literal New Testament* into English, we instead find, on several occasions, structureless “wordgasms” apparently processed by paint-shaking machines.)

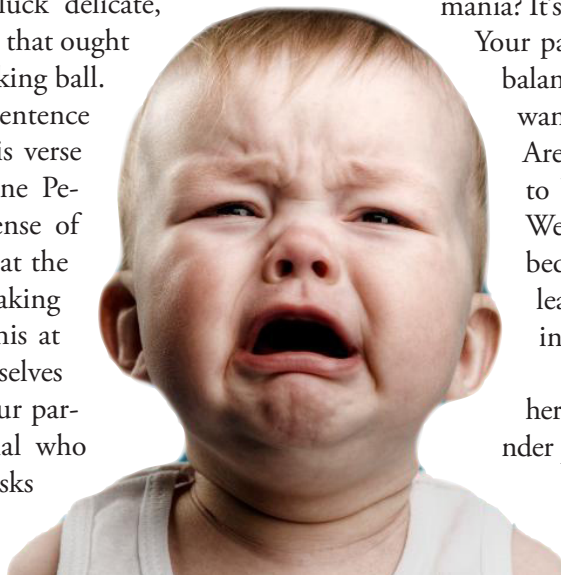
You know the story of how Adam landed us in the dilemma we're in—first sin, then death, and no one exempt from either sin or death. That sin disturbed relations with God in everything and everyone, but the extent of the disturbance was not clear until God spelled it out in detail to Moses. So death, this huge abyss separating us from God, dominated the landscape from Adam to Moses. Even those who didn't sin precisely as Adam did by disobeying a specific command of God still had to experience this termination of life, this separation from God. But Adam, who got us into this, also points ahead to the One who will get us out of it.

Eugene Peterson, I am just a tad disappointed in you. This is your simplification of Paul's verbal mania? It's a script for a television mini-series.

Your paraphrase has been weighed in the balance—on this passage—and found wandering. “You know the story ...” Are you sure this is how you want to begin? Paul is now Uncle Remus? We are sitting on Paul's lap before bedtime? At least it's entertaining. At least your tigers jump through flaming hoops—I'll give you that.

Do I have to do everything around here? Very well. Here, then, is the Zender paraphrase of Romans 5:12-14—

Because of Adam's sin, death entered the world. We inherit



death from Adam. It is because of this mortality that we sin—all of us. Sin has been in the world since Adam, but where there is no law, sin is not reckoned. Even so, death still reigns from Adam to Moses, who brought the law. Death reigns even over those who didn't do what Adam did, namely us. Christ undoes everything Adam did, which is why I bring all this up in the first place.

Upon this paraphrase, then, I shall build this week's article, and the gates of hell (*i.e.*, Paul, Knoch, Peterson) shall not prevail against it.

### SIN/DEATH, THEN DEATH/SIN

Adam is the first and only person to sin and then begin dying as a result. The rest of us sin *because* we are dying; the thing is reversed for us. It is death, not sin, that is passed on to us from Adam. We are not born sinners, but rather mortal. (I'm not saying we *aren't* sinners; I'm saying that, technically, it is mortality, not sin, that travels through Mommy's umbilical cord.) Mortality is the petri dish in which sin thrives.

When God makes us immortal, it will be impossible for us to sin. For human beings, death is the host, sin the parasite. Remove the host, and sin has no feeding ground and therefore dies. Paul need not say, in 1 Corinthians 15:54, "Now, whenever this mortal shall be putting on immortality ... we shall no longer sin." It's a given. In fact, where does Paul ever say that we will one day no longer sin? I can't find it—and don't need to. That ground is covered by the phrase "putting on immortality." Eliminate death, and you eliminate sin. Eliminating death is precisely God's plan, for Paul's sentence in 1 Corinthians 15:54-55 ends this way,

Now, whenever this mortal shall be putting on immortality, then shall come to pass the word which is written, 'Swallowed up was Death, by Victory. Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O Death, is your sting?

The sting of death, of course, is sin (1 Corinthians 15:56).

### THE "DIRTY BIRTH"

My dad would have loved this truth. He always used to talk about how he hated the Bible classes his parents made him attend. He hated the idea of what was then called, "the dirty birth," otherwise known, I suppose, as "total depravity." The theory is that everyone is born rotten. My dad's teachers suggested that if every baby died at

birth it would be sweet revenge by God on a wasted collection of skin, sinews, bones and breath. This made my dad think that God had made a mistake in creating humans. God couldn't make anything right, not even His premier creation. None of this is true. God made humanity and called it "good." But then Adam sinned, and death took the steering wheel of his life. The new mortality operating in our forefather made him unable to do all the good he wanted to, for "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41)." The flesh is weak because of death. Remove death, and the flesh bounces back like a foam cushion, too long sat upon, to assume its original shape.

There is nothing wrong with human nature. Human nature has been debilitated by death. Remove the death, and human nature will do what it was meant to do before God purposely weakened it to teach us vital lessons about grace.

Here again, for fun, is the awkward wording of the *Concordant Version*:

**Therefore, even as through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned.**

It is death, not sin, that is "passed on" to us from Adam. As previously stated, Adam was the only one who sinned first, and then became mortal, thus Paul's phrase, "through sin death." "Through sin death" applies only to Adam. Since it is the death, not the sin, that is transmitted genetically, the death becomes the "on which" thing on which sin flourishes, making the rest of humanity sinners. There is where I get my petri dish analogy. The petri dish is the host "on which" the virus flourishes. The dish comes first, then the virus. Thus also death and sin.

I think I have repeated this enough so that you will not forget it.

### THE EASE OF IMMORTALITY

This truth of death first, then sin, comforts me. First of all, thank God I wasn't born Adam. Thank God I'm not the one who sinned and sent death down the line of humanity. (I have thought that we should all line up in the resurrection to take turns slapping Adam, except that his sin provided the necessary backdrop for a revelation of Jesus Christ. So I guess we will be shaking his hand instead—*after* we slap him, perhaps.) Secondly, this truth of death first, then sin, should make us realize that the terrible thing debilitating us (death) is only temporary. Not

only that, but it's not our fault. Death oozes into us in the womb, via Adam. Since death is not our fault, then neither is the resultant sin. (I apologize for being so logical; I can't help it.) If death is temporary (and it is), then so is sin. All God has to do is eliminate death, and sin automatically disappears. He can kill two birds with one stone because it was He Who made birds of a feather (sin and death) flock together in the first place.

God showed how easy it was for Him to eliminate death by raising Christ in a nanosecond. There was no fuss in the tomb; He simply breathed the spirit back into His dead Son. It was the same when Jesus raised Lazarus. The only reason Jesus made a fuss—He cried out Lazarus' name—was to ensure that the onlookers connected this amazing miracle to His command. He knew that word of



the miracle would spread and He needed the Pharisees to eventually become even more jealous of Him than they already were so that they'd condemn Him to death. The plan worked perfectly. Other than Christ needing to make a point, immortality is inaudible. Immortality is fast and quiet. These are two things I really love about immortality: the speed and the decibel level. A couple of other things are: the abolition of death and the permanent sin fix.

**... for until law sin was in the world, yet sin is not being taken into account when there is no law; nevertheless death reigns from Adam unto Moses, over those also who do not sin in the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him Who is about to be (Romans 5:13-14).**

Be quiet, Paul. You lost your chance.

Some people might get the crazy idea that there was no sin in the world until God brought the law through Moses. Not true. Sin is simply not taken into account when

there's no direct command against it. This doesn't stop it from existing. It still came into the world through Adam, via death, and remains via death. This is why Paul says, "death reigns from Adam unto Moses." No one will be able to deny the universal reign of death, so Paul uses that to make the not-so-obvious case of universal sin, for, as Paul will write a few sentences later, "sin reigns in death" (Romans 5:21).

Even after all this, some smart-alec might shove his hands smugly into his pockets, rock back and forth on his heels and say, "Yes, well, *I* did not sin in the likeness of the transgression of Adam." In other words, "*I* didn't eat the forbidden fruit, so why am *I* reckoned as a sinner?" I like to think that Paul wanted to exercise a little sarcasm here and retort, "This sin and death includes everyone, even those of you who didn't happen to eat the fruit from the tree in Eden given you by your wife who had just lost a major moral battle with a snake." Instead, he said what he did—in the most boring, awkward manner possible.

Paul makes all this fuss in order to set up a vital contrast between the single sin of Adam and the single act of righteousness of Jesus Christ on the cross, and to show what this means for all humanity.

What follows in verses 15-21 will blow your death-infected sinning little minds. —MZ

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