

Who's Your Head?

David Hart • Bible Truth Chapel • 11/14/2021

Since the beginning of our series we have been taking the time to carefully build a strong foundation upon which to build our understanding of Paul's incredible letter to the Ephesians. We began by putting the letter into perspective, which is defined for us in chapter 6. Paul warns us that we are under attack by Satan and his spiritual forces of evil. Not only does he oppose all that God is doing, but he is terrified that if we ever figure out how to activate the truths Paul presents in this letter, that he will be powerless against us.

So his goal is to drive a wedge between us and God, to convince us that God is against us so that we won't want any of the blessings He gives us through the gospel. To accomplish this he lies to us about God, telling us that God is not for us. Of course this isn't true, but we still believe it. You need only consider how much time you spend thinking about and applying the truths in this letter to determine how effective Satan's lies have been in your life. The only weapon that works against a lie is truth, which explains why Paul introduces his letter with a barrage of truth bombs that not only demonstrate that God is for us, but which describe the lengths to which God has gone to prove it.

In one explosive sentence that spans verses 3-14 of chapter one, Paul tells us of all the spiritual blessings God has showered upon us: that He has chosen us for blessing, that it has always been His plan to restore our broken relationship by adopting us into His family. Last week we saw that in order to adopt us, He first had to make us as holy and blameless as He is.

But there's a problem. In his letter to the Romans Paul goes to great lengths to assure us that

Romans 3.10-12,23 "No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one....For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

This is no surprise, really. We see it every day. The problem is that the only way we can be holy is if we have *always* been perfectly pure throughout our entire existence. Even the slightest sin would render us unholy in God's eyes.

Habakkuk 1.13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.

The only way we can be blameless is if we had never done anything that would make us guilty. If for any reason God declares us holy and blameless when He knows full well that we have sinned, then He utterly compromises His integrity. And yet, God tells us quite explicitly that His purpose is to make us holy and blameless in His sight, and as we have seen, when God says He's going to do something, it is as good as done.

The fact is that God does not just *declare* us holy and blameless by executive order. He *does* something that results in our becoming holy and blameless in His sight. According to verse 7, we see two things God did to make this possible:

1.7-8 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

He redeemed us and He forgave us.

To **redeem** means to deliver someone from bondage or punishment by paying either a ransom or a fine. It assumes that the one being held in bondage is destitute and cannot purchase their own freedom. In many cultures (including the Roman world of Paul's day) it was possible for a slave to purchase their own freedom, but it was difficult because they generally didn't have much opportunity to earn the money needed to pay the price.

But in our case it's even worse: the purchase price is so high, that we can never hope to gain our freedom. The Bible describes us as being in bondage to both sin and the Law. Being enslaved to the Law means we must pay the price for every sin we commit. What is the price of sin? Paul tells us in **Romans 6.23** that "the wages of sin is death."

To make matters worse, the Lord tells us that we are also enslaved to sin,

John 8:34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

...which means we do whatever master sin tells us to do, which means we cannot stop sinning...we cannot stop doing the things that get us in trouble with the Law. Throughout our lifetimes we rack up a debt we cannot possibly pay.

Thankfully God recognized the impossibility of our situation, so He redeemed us - He sent His only Son into the world. That Son - Jesus - not only kept the whole Law, He was perfectly holy and blameless, so the Law had no claim against Him. So God's Son purchased our freedom by sacrificing His own life. He became our Redeemer not just because He redeemed us but because He Himself was the redemption - His life was the currency used to purchase our freedom.

1 Timothy 2:6 He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone.

But God hasn't just redeemed us. Paul says that He also forgave us. Biblical **forgiveness** is similar to our secular definition of forgiveness, only it goes much further. For example, when we forgive someone we release the person from the penalty of their offense. We recognize that they are guilty of the offense, we have just decided not to punish them for it...to let it go...in a sense to pardon them. But biblical forgiveness goes further because it also releases them from guilt.

Psalms 103.12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed the guilt of our sins.

Catch this: the reason God doesn't punish us is because in His eyes the sin itself no longer exists, the guilt is removed, and therefore there is no basis for punishing the person.

For guilty people, this is incredible news. But, does anyone see a problem with this?

That God would see our helpless bondage and offer to redeem us - I get that.

That God would acknowledge our guilt and yet in mercy decide to pardon us so that we are not punished for our offense - I get that.

But here's what I don't get: how can God - who knows all and sees all, who is perfectly just and holy - how can He essentially rewrite history by omitting a lifetime of offenses He knows actually happened? It's nice, but it smacks of injustice.

The good news is that God is not unjust. In fact Paul elsewhere tells us that

Romans 3.26 God is just and the the one who justifies.

As I have said before, it is not that God has simply issued an executive ordering declaring us holy, blameless and even forgiven so that we are released from all guilt. He has, in actual fact, made us *actually* holy, *actually* blameless, and *actually* forgiven. But how? My friends - the answer is going to blow your socks off. May I suggest that you hold on to your shoes so we don't have a sock blizzard in the room?

In order to understand how God can make us actually holy and blameless, how He can remove our guilt, we must first understand how sin entered the world in the first place. You know the story: God created a man and woman and placed them in a beautiful garden. Two perfect people living in a perfect world. God had given them the world to enjoy, with the exception of the fruit of one tree, clearly marked in the center of the Garden: the Tree of the Knowledge of God and Evil. Unfortunately Adam and Eve disobeyed God, each eating the forbidden fruit, and instantly everything changed as sin and death entered the world, and God banished them from His presence.

In no time we see the consequences of sin spreading to their children, and throughout the creation: Pain. Toil. Decay. Death...even murder. In a relatively short span of time conditions became so bad, humanity became so corrupt that God was compelled to interrupt the descent into moral chaos by inundating the world with a global flood, killing all but eight inhabitants.

As tragic as these events are, this is what we would expect. Adam and Eve sin, and the rest of humanity is affected by the consequences of their choice. It is not until centuries later that we come to realize that far more happened on that fateful day than anyone realized. One of the earliest clues is found in Psalm 51 where David tells us that he was,

Psalm 51.5 ...guilty of sin from birth, a sinner from the moment my mother conceived me.

Wait a minute: sinful at the moment of conception? I can see that we might possibly commit a sin soon after birth: you're born, the doctor slaps your behind and you slap him back. It's unlikely, but, hey! anything's possible. But seriously, how many actual sins had you committed at conception? None, and yet the Bible is basically telling us that we enter life *already condemned as guilty sinners*.

This puzzle remained unsolved until Paul cracked the mystery in his letter to the Romans. **Turn to Romans 5**. In the next moments we are going to read one of the most difficult passages in all the Bible. In fact two of the most difficult passages are Romans 5 and Romans 7. It is no wonder that the apostle Peter once wrote that "some of Paul's comments are hard to understand" (2 Peter 3.16)...so do don't panic if you don't understand it. Our task this morning is to ask the Holy Spirit to help us make it clear and understandable.

5.12 *When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.*

At first glance this makes perfect sense. We naturally assume that Adam's sin became a precedent that others imitated. It introduced an attitude and a value system that he passed on to all his children. And as each followed his example they became guilty and subject to the penalty of death. The reason everyone dies is because everyone sins. In this Paul lays down an important fact: that sin always results in death, so much so that the mere fact that a person dies is absolute proof that they had sinned. Where there's smoke there's fire; where there's death there's sin. But in verse 13, Paul anticipates an objection...

13 *Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. But it was not counted as sin because there was not yet any law to break. Still, everyone died—from the time of Adam to the time of Moses—even those who did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did.*

Adam disobeyed a direct command from God, and centuries later those who had received God's law in the wilderness also disobeyed direct commands from God. But what about those who lived in the centuries between these two commands: all of those people died, which indicates that they had sinned. But how can they be held accountable for sinning if they didn't have any direct command from God to regulate their behavior? That doesn't seem fair.

As we continue with the passage, Paul is going to start comparing the sin of Adam with the gift of God. Let's read from verse 14. This deep wading, but don't panic, we'll break it down.

Now Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come. **15** But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ. **16** And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. **17** For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's

wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.

18 Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. 19 Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous.

For the purpose of keeping things simple, I'm going to focus first on the features of Adam's sin so we can concentrate on that.

15 For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many.

16 Adam's sin led to condemnation.

17 For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many.

18 Adam's sin brings condemnation for everyone.

19 Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners.

So far we have assumed that, like Adam, each individual is responsible for the choices we make. If we obey we remain innocent. If we disobey we become guilty and are condemned to death. That makes sense. **Unfortunately, that is not what Paul is saying.** There was a time when he would have agreed, but granted Him an incredible insight that changed his understanding of sin forever. What you are about to hear is a truth that is absolutely unique to Christianity.

The key phrase here is in verse 18: Adam's sin brings condemnation *for everyone*. In other words, God is holding us responsible for *Adam's* sin. Let me say that again: God is holding us responsible for *Adam's* sin. When Adam disobeyed God, not only did he become guilty, not only was he condemned to death, but we were declared guilty and condemned at the same time for the same act of disobedience - as if we had committed it ourselves.

I know what you're thinking, "But wait, I can't be guilty...I didn't exist yet. I have the perfect alibi." We have such a strong sense of individuality and justice that is being seriously violated by this arrangement. We don't like group punishments: if one kid breaks a rule, no one gets to go out for recess. Be patient, you are about to discover why things had to be arranged this way, that it is actually quite ingenious.

The phrase "in Christ" is extremely important to our understanding. In fact Paul accounts for 84 of the 96 uses of the phrase in all the NT letters. But there is a companion phrase that is just as important, though it is only used once - again by Paul: "in Adam". Pay attention to how Paul combines the two phrases:

1 Corinthians 15:22 For as *in Adam* all die, so *in Christ* all will be made alive.

In our passage in Romans 5, Paul goes into great detail making the same comparison, even though he doesn't use either phrase. Look at the last phrase of verse 14...

14-15 *Now Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come...But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift.*

In other words, Adam and Christ function in the same way - they have the same kind of role, but their impact is totally the opposite.

15/17 Adam's sin brought death to many...but Christ (God's gift) brought forgiveness to many.

16/18 Adam's sin caused many to be condemned...but Christ (God's gift) caused many to be made righteous (i.e. justified).

19 Adam disobeyed God, but Christ obeyed God.

We have a choice: to die or to live, to be declared guilty and be condemned, or to be declared righteous and set free. Which consequences you experience are determined not by your own obedience or disobedience, but by the obedience or disobedience of the one you are identified with. If you are "in Adam" (i.e. you are on Adam's "team"), then God counts His disobedience as yours, and you are subject to all the consequences of his disobedience. But if you are "in Christ" (i.e. you are on Christ's "team"), then God counts His obedience as yours, and you are subject to all the blessings of his obedience. Why has God arranged things this way?

We have all sinned. We are all guilty. We are all condemned to death. We are all separated from the life of God. We are all doomed because we cannot save ourselves. But there's good news: there is a way of escape - but it is a long shot. We can go free if we can find a person who is willing and able to take the punishment for our sins...i.e. they have to die for us. A life for a life. The only catch is that that person, that substitute, has to be perfect. If they aren't, then they can't die for our sins because they're too busy dying for their own sins.

So here's the question: how many perfect people are there in the universe? One. Only one, and that is Jesus.

God sent His Son Jesus into the world to be our substitute. But here we encounter a problem: the rule is 'a life for a life'. There is only one Jesus, so how many people can He save? One. He gives His life in exchange for their life. That's it. That's great for that person, but what about the rest? That's not a very good solution, is it?

This is why God had to come up with another arrangement. He always knew that things would turn out this way, this is why He instituted this ingenious plan from the beginning. This is the plan Paul describes in Romans 5.

Here is Adam. God chose Adam as the head of the entire human race. His job is to take the test of obedience, and in so doing to represent the entire human race. You might be tempted to object, but think about it: if you had to choose someone to take a math test on behalf of everyone, who would you pick? The person who was the best at math. That's what God did: in choosing Adam God chose the one person with the greatest chance of success.

He lived in a perfect environment.

He did not have a sin nature.

He had never sinned before.

He had direct and regular interaction with God Himself.

He only had one restriction that was clearly marked - no possibility of confusion.

He was a great candidate. But he failed, and as a result the consequences of his sin passed on to everyone. We are guilty because of His sin. You might say that God considers us complicit in Adam's sin.

When we come into the world, which team are we on? Adam's team. We are "in Adam". This is why we are sinful from the moment of conception because we inherit Adam's sinful human nature.

But when the time came, God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to save us. But more importantly, He designates Jesus as the head of a new race. Just like Adam, His job is take the test of obedience, and in so doing to represent the entire human race. Again, you might be tempted to object - "Hey that didn't work out so well the last time"...but while Adam was a great candidate, Jesus is the perfect candidate. He is God. He isn't capable of sinning. He took the test, and passed it with flying colors.

But that's not all, He went further: He then took the sins of the whole world upon Himself - in other words He took the blame of our sins upon Himself as if He had committed them. In so doing He took our guilt upon Himself, He was

condemned, and executed. He literally paid the price for our sins. But once He died, the debt was paid. This is why one of the last things Jesus said while He was dying on the cross was, "It is finished".

Since He had no sin of His own, death had no claim on His life, so God raised Him from the dead. All that remains is what was always there: a life of perfect righteousness, holiness, and blamelessness. Remember He is God, so we're talking about the righteousness of God, the holiness of God, the blamelessness of God. The life of God.

Now here's the ingenious part: because Jesus was the head of a new race, we have the opportunity to switch teams, to leave Adam and join Christ. In fact God *wants* us to do this. He *invites* us to do this. If we do that, we leave behind all the effects of Adam's sin - we are no longer subject to them. We are now subject to all the effects of Christ's obedience and sacrifice. Just as God imputes the consequences of Adam's sin to us, so God imputes the consequences of Christ's obedience to us. His nature becomes our nature. His righteousness becomes our righteousness. His holiness becomes our holiness. His blamelessness becomes our blamelessness. In many ways His moral history becomes ours...i.e. He never sinned. So when God imputes the righteousness of Christ to us, His moral history becomes ours as well. Because we are "in Christ", from God's point of view we never sinned.

Ah....do you see where this is taking us? Remember the original question: How can God make us holy and blameless in His sight, when we are by nature so full of sin? This is how He does it. He doesn't reform us. He replaces us with Christ. The reason He no longer sees any of our sin is because all He sees is Christ, and when He looks at His Son all He sees is *His* righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

1 Corinthians 1.30 Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

God isn't bending the rules. This is why Paul says that...

Romans 3.26 God is just and the the one who justifies.

Or, in other words, God is righteous, and the One who makes us righteous. God not only sets the standard, but He causes us to meet the standard, but He does so in a way that is perfectly consistent with the demands of justice. Sin must be paid for, and it is.

And THAT is how it is possible for God to make us *actually* holy and *actually* blameless and *actually* forgiven in His sight. "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

The question is: how do we change teams? How do we move from Adam to Christ? Folks, it is simple. God has done all the work. God invites us to change teams. It is a matter of courtesy: if He willingly took the punishment for your sins upon Himself,

Doesn't it seem right that you would admit that you're the one that is the sinner - not Him? WHY NOT DO THAT RIGHT NOW?

Doesn't it seem right that you would acknowledge that He is the only one who can save you? WHY NOT DO THAT RIGHT NOW?

Doesn't it seem right that you would ask Him to forgive you? WHY NOT DO THAT RIGHT NOW?

Understand that when you make the switch, there are conditions:

1 Corinthians 6.19-20 You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

He purchased you. You owe your life to Him, to live for His glory.

