

Romans 5:12-15. Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—¹³ for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.¹⁴ 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 was a pattern of the one to come.¹⁵ 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!

**A Sermon Series on The Book of Romans:
The Christian Faith, One Word at a Time: Reversal**

What's trending? That has become a popular item of discussion, a regular segment in newsreports. In the age of information that we are living in, the topic of what's trending has become an interest to more and more. People want to know what the general public is talking about, concerned about, or interested in. Often the popular topic of the day or trend of the week is something rather frivolous, but other times trends can be very revealing about the culture in which we live. You may not pay much attention to the trending viral video or what hashtag is currently the most popular, however, things that are trending may catch our attention as they shine a light on certain patterns in our society or our local economy. We might pay attention to trends in the weather, because such indicators may give us an useful window in what to expect, what to prepare for, what to be concerned about, what to hope for.

Today we look at a trend that was disconcerting to say the least: sin and death are inevitable trends in our society. But God in his grace reveals an epic reversal of this trend that happens only through Jesus Christ. So today, as we continue in our study of the book of Romans, as we get back to the basics of the Christian faith, one word at a time, we will consider the term: Reversal.

As Paul continues to expound on the grace of God, the riches of God's love for us all, he strives to teach us just how wonderful, how remarkable this grace is. Last week, we were reminded that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Here the apostle, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, takes us deeper into the depths of this love. And so Paul presses us to consider the grand reversal of fortunes, the epic and eternal reversal that God has granted to us in Christ Jesus. And so in this exposition of grace, he must begin at those awful and universal trends of sin and death. ***Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—*** Adam failed to follow God's command, he broke the law of God, and ever since that transgression, sin came into the world and

has affected us all. Ever since the fall of man, this is the lot of all mankind: imperfection, sin, and death. And so ultimately, this is the trend, this is the reality, that sinners cannot escape, this is the one trend that they can't buck, or ever hope to shed. People are born, and what follows is a mixture of pleasures and pains, joys and sorrows, and the ebb and flow of life in a sinful world carries out its relentless dance and then there is death. This is the agonizing trend that plays itself out, over and over again. From Adam right on down the line. Sin comes to all and death through sin, death comes to all because all sinned.

Just a few chapters after we hear of the fall of Adam in Genesis chapter 3, we hear about how the cold reality of sin and death touches the countless lives of those that follow. In Genesis chapter 5, generations of Adam's family line are recorded and the sad refrain is played like the tolling of a heavy bell. And then he died. *Altogether, {Adam} had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.* ⁴ *After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters.* ⁵ *Altogether, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died.* ⁶ *When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father of Enosh.* ⁷ *And after he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and daughters.* ⁸ *Altogether, Seth lived 912 years, and then he died.* And so, it goes, right on down through the line, generation after generation, he lived, joy and sorrows were experienced, the ebb and flow of life played itself out, and then he died.

This trend continues. The length of life might be a little bit shorter, the names may be a little bit different, but the trend continues; sin and death affect us all. Even if a person has never heard of Adam's fall, never been exposed to the awful origin of sin and pain, the reality of all this has its way of making itself known; for death is this unyielding tide that will come and it sweeps us all away. If life is left only to play itself out to its rational extension, its inevitable conclusion, this is the dark and dismal abyss that haunts the human mind, death comes for us all... period. Even as I speak these words there is a part of me that says, Wow, that's bleak. Come on, it's the weekend of Danube Fun Days, after all, lighten up a little. But this is the stark reality, this is the cold and unforgiving pattern, this is the inevitable trend that charges through the human existence like a wildfire, and to understand this universal truth is essential in seeing how extraordinary the gift of God is, in Christ Jesus. To explore the depths of human tragedy also reveals the tremendous extent of God's love for us and how he has saved us from this terrible inevitability and has instead of death he has given us life. He, who is our righteousness, He who is the resurrection and the life, He who is our hope and salvation, He alone, Christ alone, is the only one who could break this trend of sin and death. And he comes for us, for the lost and suffering souls of this whole entire world, he comes for us and instead of sin and death he gives us life.

Most of us don't pay that close attention to what's trending when such things are light and superficial. We might give such things a passing glance when it doesn't directly affect our well-being or our daily lives, but that changes when trends intersect with the things that do affect our everyday lives. For example, while may not even know where to look to find the latest trending hashtag you may give an attentive ear to the farm report; to learn about

trends in the market you may take a peek at the latest analysis of the stock market or take note of news stories that track unemployment and other trends that effect the federal and local economy. Or we may look at the forecast and the trends in the weather to plan and prepare for our week ahead. Even then we take it all with a grain of salt. We know that projections may be altered, forecasts may not quite get it right as things may change. Trends may be a good indicator for what is coming, what we should be concerned about, hope for, or prepare for, but they do not always have the final say.

Paul, however, presents a trend that not a one of us can ignore. Sin and death is not something that we ought to take with a grain of salt, or hold out hope that we can put off, escape, or avoid. Sin and death are universal. And yet, although sin and death are these inevitable forces, many in this world try their best to ignore the data, to pretend that this won't affect them. And whether we mean to or not, we all end up in their company. We have this human tendency to look for loopholes in the law of sin and death. We try to ignore the reality and distance ourselves from the obvious and horrible trends.

Paul seems to take great care to cut this type of false hope off at the pass. He writes of those who look for exceptions in those who lived during a time of no written law. He writes of those who try to distance themselves from Adam who was given one very specific command and broke it. *It will be different for us. It's not the same.* Sinners cry and flail looking for a way to avoid the curse of sin and the dreadful reality of death. And so, Paul quickly dismisses as useless such a search for loopholes, technicalities, and exceptions. He writes, ***13 for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. 14 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 was a pattern of the one to come.*** Just because there was no official record, no commandment boxes to check about which particular sins were broken, doesn't mean that God dismissed or would not count such evil. Before the Hebrew equivalent "You shall not murder" was etched into stone, Cain killed his brother. Before there was any particular commandment that directed the people to not steal or covet, to not commit adultery, God sent a flood to wipe clean a world that had become corrupted through and through and had been evil in these very ways. There may have not been written commandments but there was sin and wickedness and God noticed, and the wages of sin was death in every way: spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death.

There are no loopholes to find, no technicalities that we can try to exploit, and yet we try. By the letter of the law, we may not have murdered anyone, but that doesn't exactly make us perfect. There may not be a particular command, in the ten commandments that tell us that thou shalt not be rude to my spouse, but God is not please when we act in such a way. There may not be a specific listing in the ten commandments that tells us that we should not be profane in our talk, or crude or lewd in the entertainment that we seek out, but even though such a transgression may not be listed by name in his 10 commandments, it is still very much a sin. And what our conscience often knows and feels to be wrong, God makes that clear throughout the rest of his word. And of course, there is one more glaring strike against us. Adam sinned and he fathered a son who had lost the image of God, and ever since then sinners give birth to sinners. It's right there engrained into our DNA. This is

a universal truth. Sin came to all and death through sin. There are no loopholes, there is no way around sin and the punishment of death. No matter how hard we try to justify things in our own thinking, or twist or present things in our own favor, or pretend that death won't come if we just don't talk about it; this is the inevitable trend for all of us. We are born into an imperfect sinful existence that history tells us is concluded by death.

Multitudes of people lost in this awful cycle. Lost in this downward trend from birth, and many are without any real hope. Born to live an imperfect life that is inevitably followed by death; this is the lot of humankind. There would be little hope for humanity except for few fleeting pleasures and passing pursuits. In a world of people who are trending toward eternal death, there is more than a few obvious examples of souls floundering about trying to find their way in this sinful existence. It is so unfortunately commonplace to hear of stories of people grasping for hope in worldly pursuits and foolish desperation only to be left disappointed. But this is the good news that blows up this trend of hopelessness. Along comes the Christ, the one chosen to shatter and destroy this pattern of sin and death. He comes to inject hope into our existence, to instill eternal joy and peace and life into our hearts. The curse has been broken. Because of Christ, life does not just end with the inevitable last breath. In his grace, his unmerited kindness, God gives to us this wonderful gift that overflows to the many; he gives us life and life eternal. In Jesus we have a new and living hope. Our lives once overshadowed by sin and death and dread are now given this glorious reality of eternal life by the one who has defeated sin and death for us. And as a result our lives are also infused with this vibrant overflow of hope, this brilliant light of purpose and peace. This the wonderful result of the the generous gift that God gives. We have crossed over from a reality that included only sin and death and we have been given this gift of life.

And this wonderful reality, this glorious truth, helps us as we navigate the ebbs and flows of life. In a world that has been filled with sin and death since the time of Adam, how wonderful it is that God's grace overflows to the many, through the one man, Jesus Christ. Salvation and life eternal overflows to the multitudes, to you and me, through Jesus Christ. May this incredible good news that God gives through Jesus Christ highlight the headlines of your daily lives, may it constantly catch your attention, may it constantly fill and overflow your heart, and daily put you on the right track, and point you in direction of thankful obedience, as you live in the joy of this grace that is God's gift in Jesus that so graciously overflows to the many, to you and me. Hope instead of dread. Life instead of death. In a word: reversal; in the name of the one man, Jesus Christ. Amen.