

The Drama of Two Adams

Genesis 2:14-17; 3:15; Romans 5:12-21

By Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • August 22, 2021 (BSCC)

Dear Congregation of Christ: This may come as a surprise to you, but did you know that all representative types of government are based on covenant theology? A *federal* government such as that of the United States, is *covenantal*. This system is based on an agreement or covenant between semi-autonomous states to form a federation with common goals, e.g., to unite different ethnic or language groups, to work together for mutual economic benefits, or to form a strong military alliance. In fact, the word “federal” is a transliteration of the Latin words *foedus* or *foederus*, which means covenant. Thus, covenant theology is also known as “federal theology.”

In Scripture, God’s covenant with man is not negotiated because, as the Sovereign Creator, he alone dictates the terms of the covenant. But while God is sovereign, he makes promises to man the creature and to all his creation. In return, man makes vows to obey the terms of the covenant.

All throughout the Bible—from Adam to Christ—God related to mankind through covenants. In all these covenants, he chose a covenant head who will represent his descendants. Adam represented all human beings. Abraham represented his family and his children. Moses represented all Israel in the covenant assembly at Mount Sinai. David as king represented the kingdom of Israel, which God promised will be an everlasting kingdom. Lastly, Jesus represented all those who will come to faith in him as Lord and Savior.

Today, in our text in Romans 5:12-21, we turn our attention to two men: two Adams who represented their own peoples, and their relationship to God. The stories of these two men form the introductory and concluding acts of a great Divine Drama in redemptive history. Their actions changed the course of human history, with eternal consequences.

Two Covenants: Law and Grace

Paul begins in the Garden of Eden, where God gave a clear command to Adam; there was no ifs or buts or maybes or loopholes, “Don’t do this and you shall die.” The reverse was implied, “*if a person does [God’s rules], he shall live by them*” (Lev 18:5). This is why this covenant of creation is also called the *covenant of works*, as the prophet Hosea also calls it (Hos 6:7).

There was no provision for grace, unlike today when, if a person committed a crime with “extenuating circumstances,” or in the state of “insanity,” he might get a lesser sentence or even be acquitted altogether. Or if a student fails to attain the minimum passing grade by only one to five points, he might get a “Conditional” grade, which means he can retake the final exam or fulfill an extra requirement for a second chance.

God, on the other hand, did not give Adam a reprieve. In the spiritual realm, he died right at that moment, his fellowship with God broken and his tenure in the Garden immediately terminated. But in the physical realm, he did get a most gracious reprieve, when God let him live 950 years after his fall into sin. But he died just the same.

Paul says that because of this one man, Adam, sin came into the world, corrupting all mankind after him with his sinful nature. Because he is the federal or covenant head of mankind, when he sinned, he represented all human beings—all his descendants. His sin is the *original sin*, which he passed on to all human beings (Rom 3:23). Even at conception in the womb, infants already possess this sinful nature, as David says, “*in sin did my mother conceive me*” (Psa 51:5).

Therefore, Paul says that sin came into the world before the Law was given to Moses, and that death also came to all mankind after Adam sinned (Rom 5:13-14). This point becomes clearer when he says that “*sin is not counted where there is no law.*” Those who are not under the Law are not counted as sinners and are not under the curse of death. Who are not under the Law? These are those who receive God’s grace in Christ, those who are under his covenant of grace. Immediately after Adam sinned, God inaugurated his eternal redemptive plan to save Adam and his progeny from sin and death. Starting in the Garden of Eden, God provided animal sacrifices to cover the shame and nakedness of man’s sin. In the fulness of time, he sent Christ the once-for-all Sacrifice who would fulfill all the shadowy animal sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin.

All mankind, even Old Testament saints, can only be justified under the covenant of grace, which God revealed in Genesis 3:15. There, God promised the coming of the Seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent. God also revealed to Abraham that he will have a Seed (Gen 12:7; Gal 3:16). Moses “*considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt*” (Heb 11:26). David believed in God’s promise that he will have a Son who will inherit his throne forever (2 Sam 7:12-13).

It was Christ’s one act of perfect obedience in his life and death on the cross that brought forgiveness of sin and righteousness to God’s people. In his role as covenant head, his righteousness is being *imputed* or credited to all those who believe in him.

Two Acts: Disobedience and Obedience

We know that all of God’s creation was “very good,” including the first Adam who was created in God’s image. He was created perfectly righteous and holy and with true knowledge of God (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). Then God wanted to confirm him in righteousness, placing him under probation by a covenant of works. But Adam disobeyed, failing his probation. From eternity, God knew Adam’s willful failure, and in his eternal redemptive plan, he ordained a Second Adam who would come to fulfill what the First Adam failed to do.

Adam and Christ were alike in that both were tested by God through the devil. But Christ’s temptation was much more severe—40 days in a barren wilderness, with nothing to eat, and no companions except wild beasts. So in verses 15-17, Paul makes a comparison between Adam and Christ. The first contrast is *one man’s disobedience and the other Man’s obedience*. Both represented their people in their roles as covenant heads. All people belong to either one of these two covenant heads—either “in Adam” or “in Christ” (1 Cor 15:22). In Adam, all disobeyed God, and in Christ, all “did” obedience.

In Psalm 1:1-3, we find images of both Adam and the Garden of Eden. Before Adam fell, he was blessed, and he delighted in and meditated on the law of the Lord day and night. He was a fruitful tree planted by streams of water, prospering in all his work. Adam was a picture of Jesus who delighted in and meditated on his Father's word day and night. His life bore all kinds of good fruits. He himself is the Living Water and the Bread of Life. And the work of his Father prospered in his hand.

Paul uses another parallel-contrast: *one trespass versus one act of righteousness* (verse 18). What was that one trespass? This "*one trespass*" was Adam's one act of disobedience in the Paradise of God. But the "*one act of righteousness*" is Christ's perfect life of obedience and sacrifice on the cross. Also, the two acts are also contrasted from the lesser to the higher. Because of God's abounding grace to many people, he gave Christ's sacrificial act as a free gift to them (Rom 5:15). This is so different from Adam's one act of disobedience through which many died. The verdict of condemnation of all mankind came after only one sin, while the verdict of justification was pronounced after innumerable sins by innumerable people throughout the ages after Adam. This free gift of justification is truly God's *superabounding* grace to man!

And this gift is Christ himself, given to many throughout all the nations, to those who would place their faith in him. He would be like Adam's children in all things, tempted like us, suffered at the hands of men, but without sin. Born under the Law by a human mother (Gal 4:4), he would fulfill all righteousness and obedience all the way to the cross. This is why Jesus always said that he came to fulfill the Law and to do the will of his Father (Matt 5:17; John 4:34; 6:38).

Adam failed God's covenant of works with him by his disobedience. But Christ obeyed his Father's laws perfectly in the covenant of grace. Then, we learn that the disobedience of Adam and the obedience of Christ led to opposite results for the whole human race.

Two Judgments: Condemnation and Justification

Paul contrasts the consequences of the acts of Adam and Christ. The first contrasting consequence is condemnation through Adam and justification through Christ.

God's gracious gift to many in the obedience of Christ was so much more than the result of Adam's one act of disobedience. Justification came after many trespasses while condemnation was brought down on all mankind after one trespass, "*Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.*"

Because the First Adam is the head of the first covenant, the guilt of his sin resulted in the condemnation of "all men"—the whole world, without exception. Likewise, as the head of the second covenant, the Second Adam represented "all men"—those for whom he died—God's elect (cf 1 Cor 15:22). All of God's elect are justified, not because they follow Christ's example of obedience, but by virtue of Christ's obedience. This is called *imputation*—being *counted* as condemned or justified or being *credited* with sin or righteousness.

Earlier in Chapter 4, Paul uses Abraham as an example of imputation of righteousness through faith, “*Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness*” (verse 3). But imputation is in both directions, our sin being counted to Christ who knew no sin, “*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2 Cor 5:21).

This is the great exchange in this divine drama of the Two Adams: the righteousness of the Second Adam for the sins of the children of the First Adam. The amazing consequence of this great exchange is the justification of many ungodly ones and the condemnation of the Most Holy One to the most cruel punishment—the equivalent of eternal suffering in hell that the ungodly ones should have suffered. This is the meaning of “he descended into hell” in the Apostles’ Creed.

However, in our time, there are some who deny this great exchange. They deny that Adam could have merited anything from God through his obedience. And they also believe and teach that God bestowed grace upon him even before sin. But what is “grace”? Grace is *unmerited or undeserved favor*, given to sinners by God after Adam sinned. A few examples of the use of *grace* as God’s disposition towards sinners are: Rom 3:24; Gal 1:15; Eph 1:6ff., 2:5,7,8; 2 Thess 1:12; 2:16; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 2:11. How can God give Adam *grace or undeserved favor* if he hasn’t sinned as yet? This is the meaning of the *covenant of grace*, in which God grants *grace* and *mercy* to sinners who do not deserve anything from him.

This rejection of the covenant of works also has one other deadly consequence. Adam would have merited eternal life if he obeyed God’s commandment. But Christ merited eternal life for us by his perfect obedience. If Adam could not have merited eternal life by his obedience, how could Christ have merited eternal life? The Belgic Confession says that we are saved when we embrace Christ with true faith “*all his merits and all the holy works he has done for us and in our place*” (Art 22 and 23, *emphasis added*). If the justification of Adam and all believers is through this faithful obedience, then this is not good news; it is the worst kind of news, because then no one will be saved! Grace, not works, justifies. Some pastors even teach that a *final justification* based on good works still awaits on Judgment Day. This is even more bad news, because if our own obedience is God’s basis for entering into heaven, then no one will enter heaven!

Dear friends: Let us praise God for sending his Son who merited salvation for us by being obedient all the way to the cross. To those of you who have faith in Christ, may God’s abounding grace always bring you to awe, reverence and thankfulness before God! And because the righteousness of Christ has been credited to you, live as those who are godly and righteous before God. Because our Lord Jesus Christ calls you to live holy lives.

And to those of you who have not received this abounding grace, may it bring you to your knees so that Christ could bring you up to heaven by the free gift of salvation from sin and death. And because it is only by faith in Christ that God will give his righteousness to you, you can rest from striving to be self-righteous by good works to earn the treasures of heaven. Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Embrace him and his perfect life, death and resurrection by faith, and you will be saved from God’s eternal condemnation.