

## Born This Way! Romans 5:12-21

Pax Romana #10

◆ It was 1985. I was 23. We walked into Mr. Burger, on 28th St., Grand Rapids, MI. Sandi and I had just graduated from Trinity College, been married, and moved to GR so that I could attend four years of Calvin Seminary, right next to Calvin College where my parents met. The last time I'd lived in GR was at the tender age of 4, at which time my father joined the Navy and began a career that moved us around the world. As we were about to take a seat in the restaurant a strange man walked up to us, held out his hand and said, "You're Herb Bergsma's son, aren't you? You look just like him." I had never met this man. I had never been to Mr. Burger. I had rarely if ever been in this town in my entire life. But he was right, Herb was my dad. He explained, "I went to college with your dad."

◆ That could be a compliment, or that could be a problem. I mean, what if I don't prefer to identify with Herb? Isn't it unfair that I have such obvious dutch-american genes? What if I'd rather have had deep brown skin and be called Estovan the Magnificent. I had no vote in the matter.

◆ Now, even though what I've been saying is pretty par-for-the-course in a culture where kindergarteners are challenged to determine which gender they prefer to be, anyone can see that my complaint is pointless. You don't get to choose your dad. You don't get to choose your chromosomes. You don't get to choose your ethnic background. Want to know what you do get? Whatever your parents gave you! I'm a

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white, male, 6' dutch-american whether I like it or not. And I'm a sinner too. I got that all from my parents. And my kids get it all from me. [I told Sandi the other day that I thought our boys got their brains from me. She said that was probably true because she still has all of hers.]

◆ **1. Well, because of my first father, Adam, I was born sinful to the core.** This is sometimes hard for us to believe, especially when thinking of the sweet, pink lips of a sleeping infant cradled in his mother's arms. The gentleness of baby's breath. But in reality that baby is an insidious monster just waiting for the body of a teenage rebel. Many in our society will tell you that doesn't really matter, just be whatever you choose for yourself. God is telling us we've all got a sin-self and it's not, as Lady Gaga would label it, "the right track, baby".

◆ **A.** Even many Christians get confused about this, thinking that we have the innate, free capability, the option of making a good choice toward God or not. Now, if by this free will you mean the ability to make day to day choices in life on a human moral level, to function as a calculating being rather than a robot, then YES on a human level we have a free will, and God allows our cooperation in many ways. But on the ultimate spiritual level my will is not free but in bondage to sin.

◆ *"the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." Romans 8:7, NIV.*

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◆ *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9, NIV.*

◆ "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean'. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'." Mark 7:20-23, NIV.

◆ That is to say then that if the depravity of man were, say, **blue** we'd be blue through and through. Cut into our minds and we'd find blue thoughts. Cut into our vision and we'd have blue images of greed, lust. Open up our hearts and we'd find blue emotions of hatred and blame. Lay open our wills and we'd discover deep blue decisions. So Jesus said...

◆ *"No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6:44, NIV.*

◆ **B.** So were we born this way? Paul makes our sinful nature abundantly clear in the opening paragraph of today's text (12-14). How did sin and death get here, and in us? Through our first parents in whom we corporately sinned (v14 *because all sinned*). Paul is not talking about the fact that eventually all of us choose poorly, that is, about **actual** sins, which people claim an infant cannot do until the fabled "age of accountability." The the Bible nowhere speaks of such an age. No, Paul is saying the

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whole human race sinned in one past action along with Adam.

We sinned in and with Adam.

◆ Now, I know what you're thinking: "Hey, I wasn't there. I didn't get to vote on the forbidden fruit thing!" Doesn't really matter. And frankly, we mustn't think that we would have done any better. Forget your mental images of a 5'11" naked man in the Garden, timid behind a bush, gingerly watching the lions. Think rather of a powerlifter looming 7' tall, ten times as confident as Tarzan. Man started out glorious! That's why it's called "the Fall." You only fall if you were higher at some point. After sin set in everything in the universe went downhill. We didn't get better as philosophical evolutionism supposes. We got worse just as the laws of science affirm! Romans 8 says creation is "in bondage to decay." Even the physical realm is affected by the moral realm, according to the Bible. Now, if the first man (and woman), closest to God, who walked and talked with God directly (something none of us has ever done), who existed in a state far more glorious and powerful than any human since, who likely had mental and physical (they lived literally hundreds of years), undoubtedly spiritual faculties far greater than our own, and the only ones with an unfallen, actually free will –if they couldn't maintain perfection, we mustn't think we would have stood a chance, or that God was unfair to let Adam represent us.

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◆ **C.** God made Adam our representative head, or our federal head. That is to say, that what would be true of Adam would be true of all who were begotten (birthed from) by Adam, both physically and spiritually. Adam set the mold! We do this all the time. You authorize your broker to trade your shares. He is your federal head. You vote a president into office. He is your federal head. He declares war on another country. Doesn't matter if you voted for him or not. Your country is at war. You are at war. If the enemy sees you, they shoot at you because you are part of your Federal government. You give someone power of attorney. They can act in your stead. You don't even have to be in court. When you are, you don't say a thing. You sit there and the lawyer is your federal head. In the same way, humanity is a whole unit affected by our first parents. (v12-14)

◆ **D.** The corruption in my very nature, and the inherited disease of sin I was born with is called **original sin**. Not original in that it's artistic and inspiring, having never been seen before we came along sinning in our own special way. But original as in it lives in the very origin or nature of who a human being is. Even if I did everything right from the day I was born, I could neither merit nor inherit salvation, due to the sinful *nature* Adam set for all humanity. This alone disqualifies me.

◆ *David says "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Psalms 51:5, NIV.*

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- ◆ Elsewhere Paul writes, "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." Ephesians 2:3, NIV. What was our nature? Beings under wrath of a holy God.
- ◆ **E. Original sin means I can't plead the usual excuses.** As soon as we humans find out that there are standards, or lines dividing right and wrong, what do we do? Look for excuses, right.
  - ◆ 1) We might claim it's ok because that's the way I am, I was born this way, and I ought to have equal opportunity to do whatever bad thing I like. Lady Gaga preaches this philosophy in one of her songs:

Don't be a drag, just be a queen  
Whether you're broke or evergreen  
You're black, white, beige, chola descent  
You're Lebanese, you're Orient  
Whether life's disabilities  
Left you outcast, bullied, or teased  
Rejoice and love yourself today  
'Cause, baby, you were born this way  
No matter gay, straight, or bi  
Lesbian, transgendered life  
I'm on the right track, baby  
I was born to survive

- ◆ What's she saying? Love yourself. There are no rules. However you feel, you claim that you were born this way and it'll be fine. Nothing could be more foolish. The serial murderer could claim the same, but he's not in her song. The four-tim-

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ing husband could claim the same, but he's not in her song either. Miss Gaga makes the mistake of comparing physical conditions with desires and inclinations. You can't choose to be black or white. You can choose and even mold your desires. Still, in a way the comparison works. Given the truth of man's depravity, all of our choices are stained with sin. We constantly lean toward the wrong choice and can't help it on our own. Paul points out this problem.

◆(v13) *"for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law."* Romans 5:13, NIV. People don't notice their own sin when they don't know God's rules, but that doesn't mean sin isn't there! It's who we are.

◆(v14) *"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."* Romans 5:14, NIV. The "time of Moses" was when Israel received the book of law from God. But sin had always been there from Adam on. Sin has always been here no matter whether you agree with God's rules or not. Even without the Ten Commandments and other laws, everybody died. That's proof of a problem of sin. The truth of original sin tells us that being born with something doesn't make it legitimate. In fact, every human being that has ever existed was born with a di-

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abolical tendency toward choosing whatever is wrong.

The excuse "That's the way I am" just doesn't cut it.

◆2) We might claim ignorance as though *that* will make us not guilty ("I'm sorry officer but I didn't know the speed limit changed when I raced into this cul-de-sac!"). The argument thinks that if we had enough education we'd be good! Just give us more knowledge, as though it will balance the scale and save our world, right? "More gun control laws will save our youth from the devastating school shootings." More laws? More laws don't change our nature. Chicago has some of the most strict gun laws in the country, and also some of the highest levels of shootings! While laws are helpful, they are not our ultimate solution to the problems. The laws tend to illustrate for us how bad our nature already is!

◆"Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin." Romans 3:20, NIV.

◆We don't need more human effort, we need a spiritual rescue! The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The giving of the law through Moses only proved that it is not a lack of knowledge that prevents us from obeying God. It's a lack of capability! *People don't need more gun laws, they need more of God's laws: love God, love your neighbor as yourself.*



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◆(v20) *"The law was added so that the trespass might increase."*

◆Law does no good for a fallen heart, except to help awaken it to its addiction to trouble and sin.

◆**F.** Finally, why is it worth knowing about original sin? Well, to put it simply, you will never love a savior until you realize how in danger you are. Your heart will only be as attached to a rescuer as you are sure you could not live without him. The ancient heretic Pelagius taught that sin was merely a result of imitating Adam's sin. In this view sin is not that big a deal that I should think on it much in a given day. I trust that I myself can do the right thing, choose the right way, imitate the right person on my own power. I'll just decide to imitate Jesus and work my way right on up into God's good graces. Many of us believe Pelagius when it comes right down to it.

◆"I will beat my alcoholism. I just gotta decide I won't drink." Ask any alcoholic how that works for them. No, you can't just decide. You need a greater power. You need God.

◆"We don't need counseling. We'll manage our marriage on our own wisdom. I'll just keep showing my partner all the things he/she is doing wrong until they don't do them anymore." Yah, how's that working for ya?

◆"My kids are good kids. They know the difference between right and wrong. I don't need to review unstinting behavior

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with them. They don't need my interference in their choices. I don't want to influence who they choose to be." Really? Demonic agents of hell know the difference between right and wrong too. That doesn't mean they can choose the right, or want to. Neither can your kids, not on their own.

◆ The situation is dire, folks. Now is the time to begin longing for a real salvation, a real savior. Now is the time to be discontented with life as usual. The rest of our text has some good news on that score.

◆ "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— (Paul picks his sentence back up in v18)...Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men."

Romans 5:12,18, NIV.

◆ **Conclusion:** Your legacy can change, but you cannot do it. When you believe in Christ you get a new legacy. We'll look into it next week. But we can't end today without a taste! This is the point of our text. Adam gave us a legacy of death. We look "just like" our dad! But join Christ's family and you get a legacy of life! One made us all slaves. The other will make you Kings and Queens, royalty.

◆ "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man,

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the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him...So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven." 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 45-49, NIV.

✦ Does resurrection interest you? Does having your life made alive interest you? Would you like to belong to heaven? Once you trust Christ as your God and savior, you are on your way to becoming "just like" him.