

Dr. Craig Keener, Romans, Session 7,

Romans 5:12-6:23

6-min. Video Overview

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Have you ever thought about the entire human story being told through just two people? It's a wild idea, right? But that's exactly what the Apostle Paul does in his letter to the Romans. He frames all of history, our identity, everything, as a tale of two men, Adam and Christ. So let's dive in and unpack this powerful way of seeing the world and our place in it.

Okay, so the whole argument really hinges on this powerful contrast right here. On one side, you've got an inheritance, something that's just passed down to us from Adam, whether we like it or not. And on the other side, you have a gift, something offered to us freely through Christ.

This tension, this pull between the inheritance and the gift, that's the key to understanding everything Paul is about to say. So let's start with the first half of this story, what we're calling the Adam problem. Paul argues that all of us, every single one of us, shares this common inheritance.

It's a universal issue that traces all the way back to that first man. We're going to see just how one person's actions could have such massive consequences for everyone. Paul zooms in on one single moment, one single act of disobedience.

For him, this wasn't just some ancient story. It was a historical turning point. It was the event that fundamentally changed the game for the entire human race that would follow.

And the fallout from that one act was huge. It wasn't contained. It's like it opened a door and through that door, sin and its inevitable consequence, death, walked into the world and became a universal human experience.

It became our shared broken reality. Now, this is a really important distinction to make. Paul is not saying that we're guilty for the specific thing Adam did.

No, the idea is that we are born into a state of alienation with this broken connection to God. And in that state, we're all vulnerable to sin. And just like Adam, we all end up choosing it ourselves.

But you know, the story doesn't end there. Not by a long shot. In fact, this is where everything flips.

Paul introduces a second figure, Christ, who doesn't just bring a solution, but as you can see, a greater gift. Something so much bigger and more powerful than the problem ever was. And this point is absolutely crucial.

As Dr. Craig Keener puts it here, this is a deliberately lopsided contrast. Paul is not setting up some neat balanced equation where one good thing just cancels out one bad thing. Oh, no.

The whole point is that the gift of grace through Christ completely and totally overwhelms the transgression of Adam. It's not even a fair fight. And this chart just illustrates that lopsided comparison so brilliantly.

Let's just walk through it. Where Adam's act brought judgment and condemnation, Christ's obedience brings a free gift and justification. Where Adam led to death, having this reign over us, Christ leads to us reigning in life.

Where Adam's story made many people sinners, Christ's story makes many righteous. And look at this last one. Where sin increased, grace didn't just meet it; it increased all the more.

It's a total knockout. And you can see this overwhelming generosity even in the words Paul chooses. I mean, get this.

In just three verses, he uses the words grace and free gift eight times. He is just hammering this point home. He wants to make it crystal clear that this isn't something we earn.

It's bestowed. It's a gift that elevates us to a completely new way of being. Okay, so that's the big picture.

We're all born into Adam's story. So how does a person actually get out of that story and into Christ's story? How do we get our hands on this gift? Well, Paul points to a powerful symbolic act that his audience would have instantly understood: baptism. Now, to really get what Paul is saying, we have to kind of step back in time.

We have to put on first-century glasses and ask this question. What did baptism even mean back then? Because that word wasn't a blank slate. It was loaded with meaning, especially from Jewish tradition, which is what we need to look at next.

You see, for a Gentile, a non-Jew, who wanted to convert to Judaism, baptism was a huge deal. It was this non-negotiable act of conversion that symbolized a total break from the past. It was seen as washing away their old life.

And it was so powerful that it was understood to literally dissolve their old family ties. It made them a new person. Dr. Keener gives us this fantastic analogy to help us get it.

Baptism is like an engagement ring. See, the commitment of the heart- that's faith. That's already happened.

But the ring is the outward public sign that seals the deal. It declares to everyone, I'm committed. It's the visible proof of an invisible change.

So here's the crucial point. When Paul talks about Christian baptism, he's tapping into all that rich meaning. He's saying that going down into the water is a picture of being united with Christ in his death.

It's dying to that old life, that old self from Adam. And then coming up out of the water is a picture of sharing in Christ's resurrection, being raised to a completely new kind of life. So this new identity in Christ isn't just some pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die kind of thing.

Paul insists it's a reality for us right here, right now. But that raises a really practical question, doesn't it? If we have this brand new identity, how in the world are we supposed to live? And that's what we're going to tackle in this final section, Living the New Story. I mean, that's the real question, isn't it? If our identity is new, how should we live? If God has already declared us to be new people, totally united with Christ, what does that actually look like on a random Tuesday afternoon when you're stuck in traffic? How does this new status change our day-to-day behavior? Paul's logic works on this simple but incredibly powerful principle.

Be what you are. First, he gives us the indicative. That's the statement of fact.

It's what's already true. You have died to sin in Christ, period. That's your new reality.

And only after that does he give the imperative, the command. Therefore, live like it. Our actions are supposed to flow from our new identity, not the other way around.

And the key to this whole thing is a mental shift. Paul uses this word, reckon, which is basically an accounting term. It means to calculate something, to consider it true.

Just like God reckoned Abraham as righteous, we now have to actively align our own self-perception with God's verdict on us. We have to count ourselves as being dead to sin's power and alive to God. And Paul brings this whole incredible argument to a close with one of the most famous lines he ever wrote.

It's the final stark contrast. On one side, you have what sin earns. It's wages, and that's death.

But on the other side, you have what God gives, a free gift, and that is eternal life. Two paths, two masters, two totally different endings. That's the ultimate choice Paul puts in front of us.

So in the end, Paul's entire argument leaves us right here with this final personal question. This isn't just abstract theology. This is about your identity.

If through Christ, you have really been moved out of Adam's story and into a brand new one, if God has declared you to be a new creation, well, the only question left to consider is, how will you live?