

When you go to an airport, there is one thing that you have to do correctly. This one thing makes all the difference in the world. If you don't do this one thing, you'll never get to your destination. In a modern airport, if you want to arrive at your destination, you have to get on the right plane.

In Lubbock it's not too bad. The farthest off you can get is taking the flight to Las Vegas rather than the flight to Houston. But in a big airport like DFW, you can get on the wrong plane and end up on the wrong side of the world. You could find yourself on a nonstop flight to Sydney, Australia, rather than London, England. That's about as far apart on this globe as you can get. To get where you want to be, you have to begin by getting on the right plane.

That's what Paul is talking about in our Epistle lesson from Romans this morning. Paul is telling us in essence to get on the right plane. For Paul, there are only two airlines, only two gates, only two flights. And the flight you get on determines everything. The stakes are extremely high. There's a lot riding on choosing the right plane.

Now this section of Romans is very important for us to understand and internalize. And it's tough. We're 21st century Americans trying to make sense of the thought processes of Paul, a 1st century Jew, trained as both a rabbi and Greek philosopher. And he's telling us about important things that our culture thinks are very unimportant. That makes it tough. Yet, there's a lot riding on us understanding what Paul is saying, and choosing correctly. So, let's dive into Romans ch5.

Paul is doing the old "compare and contrast" here. He's talking about two possibilities. And he sums up these possibilities with one person each: Adam, or Christ. Those are the two possibilities: Adam, or Christ. "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned."¹

Here's Paul's basic argument:

1. "Sin came into the world through one man." That's Adam. Adam sinned. That's the story from Genesis.

2. "Death came through sin." Sin leads to death. It was after Adam's sin that he becomes subject to death.

3. "Death spread to all." All of us die. That's reality. Why?

4. Paul's answer: "Because all have sinned."

That's his line of reasoning. 1. Adam sinned. 2. Adam died. 3. All of us die. 4. Therefore, all of us are steeped in sin.

Now this is one of those things that raises our 21st century American hackles. 'Steeped in sin? Me? C'mon— isn't that a little extreme?! I'm a pretty good guy. I tell the

¹ Rom 5:12

truth... most of the time. I try to be nice to people... most of the time. I don't drive more than 5 or 10 miles an hour over the speed limit. I haven't robbed a bank. I haven't murdered anybody. How can you say I'm steeped in sin?

We have this fundamental misunderstanding. We equate sin with breaking some rules. Therefore we think, 'If I only occasionally break the rules, then I'm only a little bit sinful. Or if I keep most of the rules most of the time, then I'm mostly a pretty good guy.'

But sin is not about keeping a set of rules. Sin goes much deeper than that. That's Paul's next move in his argument: "Sin was indeed in the world before the law."² In other words, sin predates 'the rules.' Sin was in the world before God laid down any rules. Even before Moses received the 10 Commandments on Mt. Sinai, sin was in the world.

Sin is not about keeping the rules. It goes much deeper than that. Do you think that God would send his only begotten Son to die just because I was driving 80 in a 75 mile-per-hour zone? No, sin is much deeper than that. What was Adam's sin? Breaking the rules? Eating a piece of fruit God told him not to eat? No. It's much deeper than that.

Remember the words from our OT lesson from Genesis. The serpent says, "You shall be like God."

That's the root of sin. Wanting to be like God. Putting ourselves in the place of God. Wanting to be in control. Wanting to be the most important person in the universe. That's sin. It's fundamental rebellion. It's wanting to do what we want, rather than what God wants.

So Paul is telling us that that's one of our choices. We can board Disobedience Airlines. We can try to be like God. We can turn away from God and do things our own way. We can get on that plane. But that's a plane that leads to death. God is the source of life. If you go the other direction, if you go away from God, that path leads to death. So putting yourself in the place of God is a dead-end street. Disobedience Airlines is an eternally dangerous flight to be on.

So what do we do? Well, we try to stay in control. We try to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. "I'm not doing what God wants? I'm not keeping all the rules? Then I'll try a little harder to be good. I'll just grit my teeth and through my own willpower, I'll try do to better.

But do you know something? Trying harder not to sin is in itself a sin! Let me say that again. Trying harder not to sin is in itself a sin. It's another form of trying to stay in control. 'I dug myself into this hole. I'll just keep digging until I can get myself out of it.' That's so futile. You can't dig yourself out of a hole. You just dig in deeper and deeper. To try to do a little better is like getting on a flight going the wrong direction and then running backwards in the plane. If the plane is going west and you're supposed to be going east, running backwards in the plane is not going to get you very far.

² Rom 5:13

So how do you get yourself out of the hole? You can't. That's the whole point. You can't do it. And if you try, you just get deeper and deeper into your hole. Because to try to get out under your own steam is to continue to try to put yourself in God's place. Don't go to the bookstore and look in the section of books labeled, "Self-help." It's futile. "Do it yourself. Fix yourself." It doesn't work.

So what do you do? You repent. Repenting doesn't mean saying "I'm sorry for breaking the rules." Repentance means making a fundamental change. The word in Greek literally means 'changing your mind, making a fundamental switch, going down a new path.'

And the essence of repentance is giving up the illusion of being in control. Repentance is giving up trusting in yourself. Instead you have to trust in God. You have to put God in charge. You can't stay on Disobedience Airlines and try to run backwards within the plane. You have to switch planes. You need to get on board with Jesus Christ. What was so special about Jesus? Well, he was the Son of God. That's important. But there's something even more important. He was perfectly obedient to God. We say that Jesus was without sin. What does that mean? It means he did things God's way. He followed God's will instead of his own. That's the difference Paul is trying to draw between Adam and Jesus. Adam sinned. Adam was in a fundamental state of rebellion. But Jesus was obedient. Jesus conformed himself to what God would have him do.

We heard that in our Gospel lesson today. The devil comes to Jesus and offers him 3 shortcuts, 3 temptations.

All three of them would divert him from obeying God. And yet, Jesus never loses focus. Jesus remains perfectly obedient even in the face of almost overwhelming temptation.

And because of that, Paul says in Romans, because of Jesus' perfect obedience, we can be free of the consequences of Sin. It's not something we earn. It's a free gift. It's a gift waiting for us to accept. Paul says,

"(Adam)'s trespass led to condemnation for all... (Christ)'s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."³

Which way will you go? The route of Adam says, feel sorry for all your sins and try to do better. Try to fix yourself. If you only work a little harder everything will be okay. That's idolatry. That's putting your trust in yourself. That's putting yourself in the place of God.

But Jesus Christ offers a different way. He's done the hard work. He has already done that which is impossible for you to do on your own. He has lived a life of perfect obedience to God. He was obedient even to the point of giving up his own life on your behalf.

And he offers you the full and complete benefits of his death on the cross. Believe in him. Put your faith in him. Put your trust where it belongs. Trust in God, not in yourself.

³ Rom 5:18-19

Sin is powerful. Death is powerful.

But God is far more powerful. And his grace is offered to you, if you will trust in him.