

“Death by Birth and Birth by Death”
Romans 5:12-21
A Summary by Dr. Jerry Nelson

The Bible says, “Without holiness, no man will see the Lord.” Because of Adam’s sin and our own sin, we all fall short of the glory of God – we lack the righteousness required to be in fellowship with God. It is that truth reiterated throughout the first chapters of Romans that makes verse 3:21 so wonderful: “But now, a righteousness from God has been made known...this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ.” But the question is, How can Jesus’ righteousness be credited to me?”

In Romans 5:12-21, the Apostle Paul contrasts the relationship we have to Adam with the relationship we have to Christ. He begins, in verses 12-14, describing how physical death (and spiritual death) spreads to every person because of our connection to Adam. In verses 15-18 he affirms that those who belong to Adam are sinners under the sentence of death. Death is the result of a single, solitary sin – Adam’s sin. Adam’s sin was credited or imputed to us because we were in Adam, so when he sinned – we sinned. We are **not** just born with a propensity to sin, which is also true, but more devastatingly, we have **already** sinned in Adam. His sin is imputed or credited to us so that his sin is also our sin and we ratify that over and over again by other sins.

But in those same verses Paul contrasts that negative outcome of our relationship to Adam with the positive outcome of our relationship to Christ. Those who belong to Christ are righteous and have life. Romans 5:19 summarizes it, “For just as through the disobedience of the one man (Adam) the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man (Christ) the many will be made righteous.” Just as Adam’s sin was credited to us, so Christ’s righteousness is credited to us.

Earlier, I asked the questions I think this text is answering, “How can the death and resurrection of a man who lived 2000 years ago personally affect me?” More specifically, “How can his righteousness be credited to me?”

Back in Romans 4 Paul wrote, 4:3 “Abraham believed God, and it was **credited** to him as righteousness.” And again in 4:5 he wrote, “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is **credited** as righteousness.” It is as profound and simple as this:

Christ's righteousness is credited to us when we trust him to credit it to us. As Paul wrote it to the Ephesians (2:8-9), "For by grace you have been saved THROUGH FAITH. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

Yes, in Adam we all sinned and the consequences are devastating – we are born in sin and we continue to sin. But now, by amazing grace, **in Christ** we are justified, the guilt and penalty of sin are removed, and we are **credited** with Jesus' righteousness.

As a part of Adam's helpless race we are sinful and condemned to death - eternal separation from God; God sees us as his enemy. But God in Christ offers us forgiveness on the basis of Christ's death for our sin AND he offers us his righteousness, his very life. Just as surely as you were "in Adam," so by trusting Jesus, you prove that you are "in Christ."

Paul's argument is a complicated one; for a fuller explanation, listen or read the sermon on Romans 5:12-21.