

“Blood of the New Covenant”

Reading: Genesis 3:17-19, 23; Romans 5:12-15; Philippians 2:5-11

Written and preached by [Luke Richards](#)

This Lenten season we are asking the question of *how* the crucifixion of Christ affects us today: what are the mechanics underlying our claim that the death of a first-century Jew can transform lives thousands of years later and thousands of miles away? And so we've been looking at the biblical models of atonement, the images used by those who went before us in the faith to explain how the blood of Christ makes us right with God. We've seen that Jesus acted as a sacrifice making things right between us and God, and that Jesus demonstrated the justice of God by putting things back into their proper order. But implied in our question of *how* is also the question of *why*: why did we need to be made right with God in the first place? What problem needed solving? The problem, of course, is what the church calls *sin*.

The story from the book of Genesis of Adam and Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden is very famous, so much so that you don't have to know much about the Bible to know that somehow Adam and Eve eating an apple ruined everything. Of course Adam was the first human God created, and as the first human he had the significant burden of setting the stage for all of us who followed him. God also created Eve so that humans could live in community with one another; we really weren't created to be completely alone. And then the serpent enters the story; it tempted Eve to eat the fruit of the one tree God had told the humans not to eat of, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And so Adam and Eve ate the fruit, the only fruit that was forbidden. The problem wasn't that they had eaten God's favorite fruit that he wanted to keep all to himself. Nor was the problem that God had set up a trap for Adam and Eve using reverse psychology, telling them not to eat the fruit knowing that they wouldn't be able to resist the temptation, waiting giddily behind the tree to catch them in the act so he could punish them. The problem was what the serpent had told them: he assured Eve that if they ate that fruit, their eyes would be opened, and they would be like God.

God had every right to place limits on the freedom of Adam and Eve, just like parents have every right to forbid their children from eating nothing but ice cream for supper. He is God; it is his prerogative to define the context of his relationship with his creation, just like it is any good father's responsibility to define his relationships with his children. But what Adam and Eve did by eating that fruit was to reject the boundaries of that relationship, to say that they were frankly not interested in the relationship God had in mind for them, and they thought they would be much better off serving as their own gods, so the true God could just as well leave them alone, thank you very much.

But that boundary was there for a reason. God created humans to need him like we need air or a car needs gasoline or a fish needs water; we simply don't work right without God. Eating a fruit seems so harmless, and God's response of pronouncing a curse on them and banishing them from the garden seems so out of proportion for such a little thing. But he knew that the breaking of the relationship would not stop with just a piece of fruit. Like an echo it would repeat through time, but unlike an echo it would grow stronger as it repeated, and in the very next chapter we see that rejection of God leading to one brother killing another. That's what happens when creatures that are made to be immortal cut themselves off from the source of life and instead choose death, when people who are designed to live in communion with their creator try to take his place, when those who were meant to love one another choose to use one another instead. That was the first Adam, the

first time God created humanity.

Theologians call the result “original sin.” It's the effect of Adam's sin that each human carries with himself or herself from birth: because that first human rejected God, every one of us will do the same. We don't have to be taught it, there's no escaping it, we're born with it. “In Adam, all die,” Paul says in 1 Corinthians, but how is that fair? How is it fair that the choice of an ancestor so long ago condemns our entire race? In our very individualistic culture we don't like the thought of corporate guilt, where we all bear the guilt of one person's sin. How is it that the very first human ate an apple and now I share in his guilt? *I* wasn't there, and *I* didn't eat it. How can Adam's sin count against me to the point that I even start out my life in the hole, so to speak?

Many, probably most, other human cultures would have less of a problem with the idea of sharing in Adam's guilt, because most other cultures have been much more group-oriented than ours, and individualism has historically not been valued. But think about it: though we do have free will, none of us are islands unto ourselves. If you're a fan of a certain sports team, you will exult in the glory of that team when they do well. You may have no real connection to any of the actual players on the team, and you might not even go to see any of their games, but you identify with them and share in their glory. Or another example: as you have lived, you have absorbed culture and language from various sources. You have some measure of choice in what parts of your culture you participate in, but you're pretty much born into it. Or still another example: a soldier fighting for an enemy country in a war. That soldier may never have done anything personally to harm our country, but in the context of war, he is taken as a member of the whole, and in a battle he might be killed as our enemy because of what his country has done.

The transmission of Adam's guilt to us today is a tricky thing to explain fully and the mechanics of it are open to some debate, but the evidence is impossible to escape: we all share in that first sin Adam and Eve committed; all of us are touched by it. All of us are born and live *in Adam*, it's as though he is our head and we are parts of his body, and so his actions so long ago carry consequences for us all whether we like it or not. Just like Adam, all of us have struggled to become our own pathetic little gods, and just as Adam did, when we do that we become less than true humans, we become less than what we were made to be. Poets and authors and artists sometimes talk about the “human condition,” that unfulfilled, aching desire for something greater, that deep pain that tells us that there should be something more to life, and sometimes they talk about it as though that deep pain is part of what makes us human. In reality, though, that deep pain of unfulfillment and longing is a symptom of the fact that we are *not* human, we are less than human. To be truly human is to be in communion with the God who made us, serving and loving him. We are less than that. We don't work right, we're broken, and we can't be cleaned up or fixed, and in our brokenness we tend to break other people and things, too; and when something is in the state where it is used up, cannot be fixed, and is causing damage to the things around it, it is fit to be disposed of.

But our God is one who loves to redeem that which is cast away, and that brings us to another Adam. In places like Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul talks about Jesus being the second and final Adam, the Adam who came from heaven. The first Adam didn't work out like he was supposed to; that Adam ended up breaking himself beyond repair and consequently breaking his entire species and the entire creation. It was time to dispose of that Adam and his family, and so God created a new one. In the birth and life and death of Jesus we see God literally creating a new Adam, a

new first human to take his place at the head of a new species of humans. But this time, rather than the humans fighting to raise themselves up to become pathetic little fake gods, God willingly decided to lower himself down to become a human. This time, instead of the first human rejecting God's plans and designs and will, this second Adam willingly placed himself in the hands of his Father, trusting himself to his Father's will no matter what. Those of us who are descended from that first Adam will do what he did, which is to fight one another for control to place ourselves on top, and so we hurt one another. But that second Adam, Jesus, took the hurt and the hatred and the shame and the pain onto himself on the cross, and rather than fighting back or lashing out in retaliation, he took that pain and transformed it, created it anew, to create something inexplicably beautiful. Instead of a creation of pain and destruction and ambition and abuse, we see a new creation of love, obedience, humility, communion with God and others, of true life in God's family.

In Jesus we see God literally creating an entirely new race of humans, *true* humans, humans as they were meant to be, and Jesus' death on the cross stands as the pinnacle of that creation and the proof that Jesus is that true human. But here's the fantastic thing: God didn't dispose of the old creation to make room for the new. He could have simply wiped the slate clean and started from scratch with his new creation, but that's not how God works. He would have been entirely within his right to wipe us out, to dispose of the old, broken creation, but instead of doing that, he chose to make a new creation in the midst of the old. Christ came as a new head for a new body, just like Adam was the old head of the old body of the human race, and just like we were *in Adam* we can be *in Christ* when we come to him and follow him. It's a body made up not of blood passed from parent to child, it's a body marked by those who have claimed the blood of Christ.

This is recycling, not disposing; this is taking the old used up things and remaking them into something new and fresh and clean. But even recycling doesn't quite do it justice, this is the sort of creation that can't be wrapped up in words. This is God reaching into us and using the old things to make a creation that is at the same time entirely new and yet still us, but it is us as we were meant to be. This is God taking the broken and defiled and glorifying it, turning the muck and the filth into beauty and health, creating communion and love out of the anger and the pain, rescuing us rather than conquering us, inviting us into a new covenant rather than punishing us for our rebellion. The first Adam was the head of the old human race and the body has to follow the head, and when Adam the head plunged down into the depths of hell, we the body followed right after him. But likewise, as Paul tells us in Philippians 2, Christ the second Adam willingly humbled himself to descend into the midst of a broken creation, and he became the new head of a new human race, and since the body follows the head, when Christ was raised up, he pulls his body up with him, and what was broken is created anew and glorified in Christ.

And as if it wasn't enough that Christ through the cross allows us to be a part of that new creation, the reality of God's work is that the new creation *is already here*. We're not waiting for it to come at some point in the future after we die or when Jesus returns, the new creation has already started, it's already coming, it's here! For example, we often hear 2 Corinthians 5:17 quoted to say something like, "If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come," but the original Greek was written a little differently. A more literal translation would be something like this: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *new creation!* The old has gone, behold! the new has come." It's not just some metaphorical new creation Paul is talking about that takes place within each person when they become a Christian. He's saying that wherever a person switches from being in Adam to

being in Christ, that act of new creation has already happened, like a flash of lightning, before you know what happened, God's act of creating new glory from the old filth has already taken place.

Where are you in that creation? Are you still a part of that first creation, the one that has given in to pain and revenge and exploitation? If so, you're living as less than what God created you to be. He's not in the disposal business, he's in the new creation business; nothing and nobody is so badly broken that our God cannot create it anew. Is your life still suffering from that old creation? Are you breaking under the load of the burdens and pain? Or are there people that you're ignoring because you think they're too far gone to mess with, and so you think we can just dispose of them? No one's life is such a mess that God is willing to abandon them; he's in the business of new creation. Or are you stopping somewhere short of new creation; you've turned to Christ and you know God, but you've stopped at being forgiven and haven't become a new creation? God's not done until he has a new creation. This Lenten season, let us each make this a time to commit ourselves to nothing less than new creation.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 2.5 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/)