


# Seminalism, Soul Life, Traducianism, Virgin Birth

 Romans 5:12-21

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We are studying Romans 5:12-21 and this is very difficult material. John Whitcomb used to say that every verse in the Bible is built on the prior verses and therefore every verse presupposes that you know every prior verse. Think how much you have to know before you can really know Romans 5:12. This is challenging material. Turn to 1 Cor 3. 1 Cor 3 classifies doctrine into two categories; milk and solid food or meat; milk is doctrine that is for babes and solid food is doctrine that is for the mature. So it's clear that not all doctrine is as easily digested as other doctrine. Of course, it is normal for a babe in Christ to partake of milk doctrine but it is not normal to stay a babe in Christ. It is normal to grow to maturity in Christ and to partake of solid food. At Corinth Paul faced the problem of a group of Christians that did not undergo normal development. When he first came and preached the gospel at Corinth they believed and as babes he gave them milk doctrine. He says in 3:2, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it." This is understandable; a babe in Christ needs milk doctrine to grow. The problem is that when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians it had been five years and they were still not able to receive solid food. He says, "Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly." Their carnal living indicated to Paul that they had not grown from being babes in Christ to being mature. And therefore he still could not give them solid food. This is not normal development according to the apostle Paul. Normal development once you believe the gospel is to take in milk doctrine as a babe and within five years grow to maturity and able to receive solid food doctrine.

However, that spiritual growth schedule is what Paul expected when his converts were involved in a rigorous training schedule. We don't know about Paul's training schedule everywhere he went and it was Apollos who was training them in his absence. All we know was Paul's training schedule at Ephesus where he spent two and a half years teaching in the school of Tyrannus. There he taught during the daily siesta from about noon to six, the heat of the day, when people took refuge indoors. We gather that he probably taught for 3-4 hours a day, up to possibly six days a week. It was a very rigorous schedule. If that was the schedule of Apollos then the Corinthians would be getting more Bible teaching in one day than we get in a week. Of course, their culture was very corrupt so they did have a lot of growing to do in order to break out of their paganism. But Paul expected them to come out within five years on a rigorous teaching schedule. Teaching the Bible was different in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. They

didn't have the language gap we have, they were Greek speakers;; they didn't have the historical gap, they were living the history; they didn't have the cultural gap, they were living in the culture; and they didn't have the geography gap, they lived in the geography. We have to slow down and work through these things to understand what they readily understood without explanation. So in reality they could cover far more ground in an hour than we could. But Paul's point to the Corinthians still stands. On their training schedule and with their background it should not have taken them more than five years to grow from infancy to maturity, from milk to solid doctrine.

Now, let's look at our situation. Can you imagine in our culture how much intense Bible teaching and individual study under an awesome Bible teacher one would need to grow to maturity? I've often marveled over Mary's magnificat because here she was a 16 year old girl and she clearly knew more theology than most Seminary professors. Growing to that kind of maturity by age 16 doesn't happen just showing up for Bible teaching once a week. Of course, tradition is that her father was a rabbi in the village of Sepphoris near Nazareth and so if that tradition is correct then she had intense training from her father. But whatever the case, we need a tremendous amount of the word of God because that's the spiritual food that makes us grow and if we're just getting a little here and a little there then we're starving spiritually. The lessons I put together to teach you are full of content. There's so much content that you could listen to them three or four times and still get something out of them. That's on purpose. I used to listen to doctrinal tapes day in and day out. I would listen to the same tapes three and four times. I was starving and I don't see any other way in this culture to really advance spiritually because since the modernist-fundamentalist controversy in the 1930's Bible teaching is at an all-time low in this country. People wonder "What happened to our country?" I'll tell you what happened. In the 1930's our country flushed the Bible down the toilet. I've heard tell that a bartender in the 1850's knew more theology than the average church attender in the 1980's. And that was 30 years ago! Now it's worse. The Bible produces a thought form that produces a very prosperous and moral and benevolent culture. But in the 1930's every denomination was swept over with liberalism, every one of them, and now every denomination has divided within itself into liberal, semi-liberal, moderate, moderate conservative, conservative, ultra conservative and most of them are on the liberal end of the continuum. So understand when I say liberal I mean the pastors in the pulpit believe that Santa Claus and the resurrection are on the same level as far as valid beliefs. Content Bible teaching is so rare that people have to drive an hour, two hours and sometimes three hours just to find a content Bible teaching church. Some people move just for the teaching because they realize something very few people understand. The word is life! But we live in a very difficult time, a time when there probably isn't a single Christian alive who underwent a normal course of spiritual development as Paul expected. And when this kind of rot has set into a culture then that is going to result in lots of Christians who undergo an abnormal spiritual life. And that is what we are dealing with.

Let me put this in perspective because all this relates to the difficulty of a passage like Romans 5:12 that has theological complexities out the wazoo. One day I remember standing around at the Seminary and Dr Wayne

House was there asking three or four of us, "What is your plan? What do you want to accomplish? What are you doing here?" And we all just stood there looking like idiots. We had no plan for what we were doing. We were just taking some bible classes. Then he started asking us "How old are you?" "I'm 23, I'm 25, I'm 24." "Do you know Greek and Hebrew?" he asked. "No," we all said, "we're going to take it though." And then he said, "You better have a plan because the men 100 years ago already knew Latin, Greek and Hebrew by the age of 18." And here you are a decade later and you haven't even started. Then he said you have to realize that you'll never be able to accomplish what those men accomplished. Ten years of study you can't get back in a week. What this means is America won't be producing any more Jonathan Edwards.' What this means is America won't be producing any American versions of Charles Spurgeon. We're way behind where we should be. This country is so biblically deprived and malnourished I'm amazed this country still exists.

What am I trying to say? I'm trying to say we're in a situation where it's very hard to teach solid food doctrine because of our historical situation, we've become dull of hearing. The author of Hebrews said that to his audience when he said in Hebrews 5:11, I have a lot to say about Melchizedek and his priesthood but it's "hard to explain since you've become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food." The "elementary principles are the *στοιχεια* in the Greek. They referred to the ABC's and 123's of theology; the basics. In other words the author wanted to teach them calculus but they couldn't handle it, they needed someone to go back and teach them their 1-2-3's again.

That's why I warned you last week; this is meat and if you are only accustomed to milk then that just tells you where you are. And it's understandable if you haven't been under content Bible teaching for several years, you've remained a babe in Christ maybe for 50 years, but it's not okay if you've been under it for years, it's not okay. There are the deep things of Christ and what you need to do is what the author of Hebrews said to do and press on to maturity, start really taking this seriously. And just because you may be mature doesn't mean there isn't more maturing to do. There is always more and that's what Romans 5:12 will show you.

What's happening in Romans 5:12ff is very complex because it impacts a lot of other areas and if you're hearing this and you're spurred to think, "How does that fit with this other idea?" and "Wait a minute, how does that work?" Then you're at least seeing that there are relationships between the doctrines in the Bible and that there is a way they connect together. What I'm explaining may not fit with everything in your thinking. You may feel tension because you have belief A over here and that doesn't seem to fit with belief B that I tell you. That's fine. You may be believing a false doctrine. But just realize you have to be a Berean and sort these things out. You may think I'm believing a false doctrine. Fine. Come talk to me about it and I'll show you why I'm believing this and not whatever you believe and I'll show the implications of what you believe because these things have all been discussed at great length in Church History. There is nothing new under the sun. I realize there are six different views of Romans 5:12 but I'm not going to sit here and walk you through the Placcan View and the

Arminian View and the New School of Theology, etc... etc...even though I've analyzed all those views and how they affect logically your doctrine of man, sin and Christ. There is a way all this fits together and we want to see how it all fits together because we know it does and it's when we're seeing how it does that we are brought into true worship, an appreciation for the majesty of our God and I want some of that to come out. That's what I want to happen in your life, the worship of God.

Let's see how it happens here in Romans 5:12 and then we'll just play some with some of the implications and side issues that bring out the bigger picture. We're not going to go any further today than just 5:12-14. First, what's the **Therefore** there for? To show the cause-effect relationship between being justified in the one man Christ and sin entering through the one man Adam. In other words, before the creation of the world there was only God and God had a plan for history. The way we are prompted to think about God and His plan for history was that He first thought about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, as the member who would humble Himself by taking true humanity and through His death bring justification to all men and from that idea the rest of the plan was mapped out. So that if justification is by the one man Jesus Christ then necessarily condemnation is by the one man Adam. Adam; what did we say the name Adam means? It means "man" but it also means "mankind" including male and female. If that's true then when Adam sinned who sinned? All sinned. That's the point at the end of verse 12 where Paul says "because all sinned." All sinned the one sin of Adam.

Now, when we say that, don't individualize yourself in Adam. This is a very important point. Don't particularize yourself inside the one man Adam. If you do that you quickly get into the heresy of the pre-existence of the soul. Pre-existence is the idea that every individual human soul existed in Adam. That's a problem because if that's the case then you've got every individual soul present at creation and then when we sinned in Adam it's not the one sin of Adam by which all are condemned but the billions of sins of each individual in Adam. Pre-existence of the individual soul is a very dangerous belief. You're not to individualize yourself in Adam, we were in Adam as a collective whole known as "mankind," the race, not as individuals. We sinned in Him as mankind, as a race, not as individuals. Berkhof explains it this way, "Adam possessed the whole human nature, and in him it corrupted itself by its own voluntary apostatizing act in Adam. Individual men are not separate substances, but manifestations of the same general substance; they are numerically one. The universal human nature became corrupt and guilty in Adam, and consequently every individualization of it in the descendants of Adam is also corrupt and guilty from the very beginning of its existence."<sup>1</sup> That's a good statement of the view I'm taking which is called Adam's Natural Headship or Seminalism or Augustinianism. They're all the same thing, just different names. And I'm a purist. Some people combine this with the Representative View or Federalism and that's the view that Adam acted as our representative such that when he sinned he alone sinned and not us in him as a race. So his sin is charged to us. I have problems with that because God never charges us with the sin of another. But some people mix these two views and when you read them it's a mishmash. I'm a pure seminalist. I don't think they mix. I

think one is true to the exclusion of the other, though that's not what I was taught in seminary. I was taught both are true.

Notice that last expression in the Berkhoff quote. "consequently every individualization of it in the descendants of Adam is also corrupt and guilty from the very beginning of its existence." If that's so, that an individual is guilty from the beginning of his existence then we have to identify when the individual's existence begins. Why? Because that's when that individual is guilty and under the just condemnation of God. So this involves three questions. One is the beginning point of the individual human soul; when does a person's soul begin? Another is how does the human soul originate, who is involved, how does God create it? And the third is the transmission of sin, how is sin transmitted to the individual? All these issues are tied up in Romans 5:12ff.

The first issue is the origin of the individual's soul. When does a human soul begin?" For clarification an individual is not a body, he has a body, he is not a spirit, he has a spirit, but he is a soul. The soul is the person. So whenever you have a soul you have a person and that is when you begin to exist as a person. This, of course, has implications for the abortion debate. There are two major views within Christianity. The first is that soul life begins at conception. When the sperm and egg unite there is a human soul. This is held by all Roman Catholics and most Protestants. The difference is that all Roman Catholics believe that God directly creates the human soul whereas some Protestants agree but most believe that God indirectly creates the human soul through the human parents. We'll talk more about that question in a moment. The second view is that soul life begins at birth. When the sperm and egg unite there is no human soul, just fetal tissue that constitutes biological life. This view is held by a minority of Protestants. It basically says that because God created Adam directly and breathed into him the breath of life then when the baby comes out God gives it its first breath and it becomes a living soul. In other words it takes the unique example of Adam and applies it to all human beings. That is problematic because all other human beings came into existence different than Adam. Adam is a unique case and it is illegitimate to carry over Adam's creation to every other human after Adam. The view chiefly uses Exod 21:22-25 as support. In that passage two men are fighting and a pregnant woman is somehow struck. They argue that the passage is teaching that if she is killed by the blow then its life for life but if the fetus is miscarried then it is just a fine and this proves that the fetus is not soul life in the womb. However, this passage is tempered with difficulties and it is not clear at all that this is the intent of the passage. The intent of the passage in context is to protect the womb. The best understanding is that the passage teaches that if the woman is struck and the baby comes forth and neither the woman nor the child is injured then there is a fine to pay because the men could not restrain themselves and thereby put the womb in jeopardy. But if either the woman or the child is injured then the penalty is injury for injury, life for life and this would prove the opposite, that the child is soul life in the womb. This is the best view of the passage and see my Exodus series for a full explanation and clarification of all the possibilities and difficulties. This view that life begins at first breath is a view I believed for five years prior to coming here and I defended it but I haven't believed it for 11 years now. The main arguments I already mentioned, an extrapolation of Adam's creation to every other human and Exod 21. The passages they have to

nullify as indicating soul life in the womb are Ps 139, Jer 4 and Luke 1. Ps 139 is the description of God's work in the womb. Jer 4 is the description of God's formation of Jeremiah in the womb. Luke 1 is the description of Mary's visit to Elizabeth's home when both were pregnant. We could go into all these passages but a bottom line argument for soul life in the womb is Luke 1:43. In that verse Elizabeth refers to Mary as "the mother of my Lord." This expression shows two things. First, Mary was a mother while the baby was still in her womb. But to be a mother the baby must be a person. One cannot be a mother of impersonal fetal tissue. Second, Elizabeth referred to the baby in the womb as "my Lord." If the baby was impersonal fetal tissue it could not be Elizabeth's Lord. To be Lord one must be a person. So the two personal references definitely prove that there is soul life in the womb. My conclusion is that soul life begins at conception. It is at that point that you are a person and it is at that point that your mother is a mother and your father is a father. You do not have to wait till birth, scripturally, for these titles to be used. They are properly used from conception.

Second issue is how does the human soul originate? The first view is that God directly creates the human soul. Again, a few say at conception and others at birth. Another problem with God doing this is that when He gives the fetus a human soul He is the one combining it with a sinful fetus such that the soul is immediately tainted by sin. This makes God complicit in sin. The view that this happens at birth has additional problems, such as how impersonal fetal tissue could be considered sinful. That's impossible, only human beings are considered sinful, not impersonal fetal tissue. This view always slides into thinking of the sin nature as something physical. It is not something physical. The sin nature is a disposition toward sin, an inclination, it is not physical, it is not a gene. Our genes are affected negatively by sin but they are not the sin nature. You could never identify a sin nature gene but that is sometimes how it sounds when these people are explaining this view. That is a dangerous way of thinking. David said, "in sin did my mother conceive me." Think about what David said...David considered himself a sinner at the time of his conception and not at his birth. David also considered himself to be 100% human at his conception and not at his birth. This view also fails to explain how if God directly creates the human soul that the child's personality is so similar to his parents. I don't see it as even remotely possible that God directly creates each human soul either at birth or conception. The second view is called traducianism and traducianism says that God indirectly creates each human soul through the human parents at conception. This view recognizes that Adam's creation was unique and never duplicated. It also points out that Eve was created out of Adam without God breathing life into her and thereby deduces that she received her soul from Adam. Every child that is conceived is not only physically conceived but spiritually conceived and this comes from the parents. This is why children look physically like their parents and have personalities reflective of their parents. It also fits perfectly with what David said, "In sin my mother conceived me." David considered himself to be a full human tainted by sin at the moment of conception. This sin was transmitted to David from his father Jesse. For some reason or other the sin nature is transmitted from the father to his offspring.

Therefore we have finally answered the question we initially asked, that is, when does an individual human begin? That question is important because it is at that point that they are guilty and condemned. So the answer

is that a human soul begins at conception and at that moment they are guilty and condemned. This is the only way to make sense of spontaneous abortion and the reason for the virgin conception of Jesus Christ. If David was conceived in sin then how could Jesus, the son of David not be conceived in sin? Only by a virgin conception. All things we'll look at in more detail in a moment.

This is the truth I am hanging my hat on, the moment the egg and sperm combine at conception there is in existence an individualized soul or person and that person is condemned at that moment for their participation as a member of the human race in the one sin of Adam. It is absolutely critical to understand that the individualization occurs at conception and the condemnation occurs at conception. Conception is the key to the whole thing and that holds whether or not the conception occurs naturally in the womb or unnaturally in a test tube. At the moment a sperm and egg unite there is a person and that person is condemned.

Now before we go to the virgin conception let's comment briefly on aborted children, infants and those who are mentally retarded. Since I maintain that these are all human souls then what is their eternal destiny if they are conceived in sin like David? The answer from Scripture would seem a logical necessity. Robert Thomas has written a little book called *Safe in the Arms of Jesus*. In that book he argues that if the condition for salvation is faith in Jesus and one is unable to meet that condition due to their being in the womb or an infant or retarded, then God in His mercy applies salvation to them. They will therefore be raised at the proper time and spend eternity with Christ, having been saved by His grace. Some people have made fun of this thought, speculating that if that were the case then there would be millions and billions in heaven one day. I would point out that if that is not the case then one could make an argument that because so few are saved then it might appear that Satan is victorious. I am speculating here but if God saves all the aborted babies and infants and retarded people then doesn't that give you the picture that Christ is victorious? We know that not many who grow to maturity and ability to believe actually believe, but if God in His mercy saved all those who never grew to the ability to believe then it would show in the end a picture of history that is quite different than what most people imagine and it is a glorious picture of God.

Now, all that I have said is necessary to understanding and appreciating the virgin conception. There are a number of things going on with the virgin conception but one of them is that Jesus had to avoid being condemned at His conception and not His birth. The Holy Spirit was involved in the conception not the birth. If Mary and Joseph together had conceived Jesus then the moment the egg and sperm united Jesus would have been condemned with the rest of us. But the Scriptures teach that what was in the womb was holy and Elizabeth even called Him 'My Lord' while in the womb. Impersonal fetal tissue could not be Elizabeth's Lord. Only a human soul could be her Lord. Now as far as the mechanics were concerned, since the sin nature is passed on from the father and Jesus didn't have a father but the Holy Spirit conceived the child in the womb of Mary then Jesus didn't have a sin nature. What Mary contributed was not a sin nature (though she had one herself) but Jesus' human nature. It is absolutely essential that Mary contribute Jesus' human nature and we not view her as

merely an incubator for the person the Holy Spirit created. The reason is because of the prophecy of Gen 3:15 which said that the "seed of the woman" would crush the seed of Satan. The Hebrew for "seed" is *zera* and could refer either to "offspring" or even "sperm." This possibility is strange because women don't have sperm. If that is the case then it would be a foreshadowing of the virgin conception. But it is necessary that Mary contribute the egg in order to transmit her human nature to Jesus. If she was nothing more than a test tube for the Holy Spirit then Jesus Christ is completely disconnected from the human race, He is not the seed of the woman and He is not the Savior. Scripture teaches that He must be the seed of the woman.

That's the whole picture so let's review. When Adam sinned we sinned in Adam, not as individuals but as a race. When a father and mother conceive, a person is individualized in the sense that a human soul comes into existence in the womb. At that instant the individual is condemned for their participation in the sin of Adam. God in His mercy applies salvation to those who cannot believe such as the aborted, infants and the mentally retarded. The virgin conception by the Holy Spirit was necessary so that Jesus Christ would avoid participation in the sin of Adam and consequent condemnation. At the same time Mary was necessary to contribute a true human nature; body, spirit and soul to Jesus. If she was nothing more than a test tube for Jesus then Jesus is disconnected from the human race and he could not die for the human race. The virgin conception was the only way to satisfy everything that began with the one man Adam in Genesis. Because we are not brought into the human race by virgin conception then each of us is born in need of Jesus. The virgin conception is not a side doctrine. It is absolutely necessary and what we are about to celebrate on Christmas is the virgin birth but remember that what had already occurred nine months before was the virgin conception and that is where the great miracle occurred.

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p 241. Berkhof disagrees with the Seminal view and holds to the Federal view but his explanation of seminalism is correct as far as I can see.