

Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 5:12-21 - Sermon Notes



Background

This passage, beginning here and continuing through verse twenty-one, has been described as one of the most difficult parts of the New Testament. The first thing we see in this verse is that sin entered this world through one man, Adam. Adam was commanded not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam disobeyed, thus sinning against God. Up until that time sin had not existed in our physical world.

The second thing we see is that death entered into this world by this sin. Paul will tell us in the next chapter that the result of sin is death. Here he tells us that it was through Adam's sin that death became a reality to us all. We see by implication that had Adam never sinned, he never would have died. In fact, God warned him about death being the consequence of disobedience when He first commanded Adam not to eat of that tree, "... for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." [Genesis 2:17]

The third thing we see in this verse is that from Adam's sin, death spread to all of us. There is no disputing the fact that all men die. Paul is simply telling us here that this death that Adam suffered as a result of his sin is passed on to all of his descendants. The reason that we all die is because we all have sinned.

In this passage Paul does not say whether he is referring to physical death or spiritual death, though his implication is physical death based on the next few verses.

Now, hang in there because there's more to come in the following verses. Remember that this letter was originally written to Christians in Rome who were predominantly Jewish and who were still tied to keeping the Law, even after their conversion to Christianity. Throughout this letter Paul has

been showing them (and us) that righteousness before God is not attained by keeping the Law but by the free, gracious gift of God, which comes only after we believe His promises.

Paul just told us that sin (and death as a result) entered the world through Adam, and death passed on to all of us because all of us have sinned. Since the recipients of this letter were convinced that sin was a result of not keeping the Law, Paul now points out to them that sin existed in this world even before the Law was delivered to Moses. In other words, sin did not commence with the Law, sin commenced with Adam.

Romans 5:12-13

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned— for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

In the previous chapter, Paul said that “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.” The word translated “counted to him” is *logidzomai*, meaning “to credit to someone’s account.” In the current verse there is a similar word, *ellogēō*, which is translated “imputed.” These two words are sometimes used interchangeably, although there is a subtle difference. This word means “to take into account” or “to take into consideration.”

Now look at this carefully! Paul says that sin is not imputed (taken into consideration) when there is no law. If we read this too quickly, we might want to respond, “If sin is not imputed where there is no law then it wasn’t imputed to those who lived before the Law was delivered!” This is precisely the argument that Paul is refuting. You see, since death is the penalty of sin and death passed on to all men after Adam, then all have sinned. Therefore, there must have been a “law” (not “the Law”) that was transgressed even before the Law of Moses was delivered. That law was, “**but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat from it; for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.**” (*Genesis 2:17*)

For those of you who think we Christians have to keep the Law (the Ten Commandments) in order to be “right” with God, you will find that Paul is arguing against you. Keeping the Law of Moses (or even keeping God’s higher moral law) is not what makes us acceptable (righteous) in God’s sight (**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [Romans 3:23]**). Only the righteousness that God gives to us when we believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as payment for our sins can make us acceptable in His sight.

Romans 5:14-15

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the trespass of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the gracious gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.

Paul is now driving home the fact that death was visited upon all men from Adam all the way up until the Law was delivered by Moses. Therefore, all the people who lived before the Law must have been sinners.

Paul here says that death reigned over mankind before the Law even though these people didn’t sin in the same manner as Adam. Sin is sin, no matter how great or how small, and it doesn’t matter whether a person sinned once or many, many times. Everyone who descended from Adam, even before the Law was delivered, is a sinner and suffers death as a result of their sin.

The closing statement in this verse is a significant transitional statement. It says that Adam was a “type” of the one who is to come (referring to Christ). conversely, Jesus Christ is a type of Adam. Paul gives a description of what he means by this in **1 Corinthians 15:45-49** where he refers to Christ as the “last Adam.” But here, Paul will compare, or more correctly, contrast, the two men (Adam and Jesus) to show us how the conduct of both Adam and Jesus has a lasting effect on each one of us personally. But he will also show us the distinct difference in the results of their actions.

In this verse Paul begins his contrasting of the consequences of the actions of Adam and Christ. Paul says that God’s gracious gift (the free gift) is not like the offense (Adam’s sin.) He doesn’t explain how it is different; he merely states it as a fact.

He then goes on to show that the work of grace of God through the Messiah is much greater than the offense of Adam. The next statement, “**For if by the transgression of the one the many died**” is a Greek first-class conditional expression, which means it is assumed to be true. Some would contend, therefore, that it could be translated as “**For since by the one man's offense many died.**” That is, as a result of Adams offense many (all of mankind) have died (or will die). Because of Adam’s sin we have all become sinners and, as a result, we all die (physically).

He now goes on to say that the grace of God, and His gift of eternal life, which is given to us by that grace, is greater than the offense that brought sin and death to us all. Paul is simply telling us that God’s gift (salvation through faith) is offered to all freely (by grace) and that it is more than enough to counter the sin that we commit as a result of being Adam’s descendents. And, this gracious gift is given through one man, Jesus Christ. We receive this gift, not by obedience to the Law, but by belief in the sacrificial death of the one innocent man, Jesus, the Christ.

The final phrase in this verse says that the gift “**abounded to the many.**” The words “**the many**” are referring back to the first part of this sentence which says, “**For if by the one man's offense many died**” so it is also referring to all of mankind. In other words, the gift of grace “is more than enough” for the many (all of mankind) who have sinned.

Romans 5:16-17

And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the gracious gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

As if making a play on words, in this verse Paul repeatedly uses nouns that end in *ma*. In each case it indicates the result of an action. These words include:

- “gift” - *dōrēma*, derived from the verb *dōreo*, meaning “to bestow a gift.” It refers to a gift.
- “judgment” – from *krima*, which is derived from *krinō*, meaning “to decide” or “to judge.” Whereas it can refer to a decision of innocence or guilt, it is most often used in relation to a guilty judgment.
- “condemnation” – *katakrima*. The prefix *kata* means “down” or “against” and *krima*, as we just saw, means a judgment. Therefore, this word means “a judgment against” or “condemnation” as we have it in this verse.
- “justification” – from *dikiōma*, which is based on the verb *dikaioō* meaning “to declare righteous” or “to declare innocent.” Therefore, *dikiōma* refers to the result of the declaration. That is, our righteousness or justification.

This is a tough verse, so follow closely. It's the second time Paul is contrasting the effects of the deeds of Adam and Jesus. Previously, he said that death (the consequence of sin) flowed from Adam but that the gift of grace flowed from Jesus.

A literal word-by-word translation of the first phrase in this verse is, “**And the gift not like through the one having sinned.**” Fortunately, a couple of words have been added by the translators in order to make the verse clearer. What Paul is saying is that the free gift is not like the one sin of Adam.

for (on the one hand) the judgment is out of one (deed) resulting in condemnation, but (on the other hand) the free gift is out of many transgressions resulting in justification.

Though the grammatical construction is a bit awkward in English, Paul is saying: “on the one hand the judgment that came from one deed resulted in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift that handles many transgressions results in justification.”

If we were to sum up this verse it would be to say that death (the consequence of sin) flowed from one transgression (one sin), but the gift of grace is effective over many transgressions resulting in our justification.

Paul now combines and summarizes the previous two verses in a single statement. He starts off with, “**For if by one man's offense death reigned.**” This is another first-class conditional phrase as we saw two verses back, so we can read it as, “**For since by one man's offense death reigned ...**” But the word, “**man's**” is not present in the original, so we can read this as, “**For since by one offense death reigned by one (man) ...**” In other words, Paul says death has reigned as a result of one offense by one man.

The next phrase starts out with “**much more.**” This phrase is of even greater impact than the previous phrase. This phrase, “**those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness,**” is talking about those of us who have been saved by grace through faith.

He now makes another play on words in the midst of this very difficult passage. In the first part of this verse, Paul talked about **death reigning** over all of mankind as a result of sin. Now he says that we who are saved **will, ourselves, reign in life**; that is, in heaven we will reign with Christ in a state of eternal life. And that reign of ours, with Christ, will be the result of one man, Jesus Christ.

Now let's read this entire verse: “**For since by one offense death reigned by one (man), much more those receiving an excess of grace and the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by One (man), Jesus Christ.**”

Romans 5:18-19

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were appointed sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be appointed righteous.

These verses are a summary statement of what Paul has been saying since verse twelve. He has stated this almost repeatedly since then, so we won't belabor it further.

However, let's do our own quick summary of Paul's letter so far to put this all into context. He started out by declaring that God is evident to all men, but because some refused to recognize God for who He is, He gave them up to a depraved mind so as to not only do ungodly things, but also to approve of others who do the same thing.

In chapter two he showed that God judges impartially. To those who do well He will give eternal life, but to those who are self-seeking and unrighteous He will show His wrath. He also began his argument that circumcision of the flesh and obedience to the Law do not produce righteousness.

In chapter three he went on to show that in spite of circumcision, the Jews are no better than Gentiles because, as it has been written, “**There is none righteous, no, not one.**” We are all sinners deserving of God’s wrath. He continues by saying that the righteousness of God has been revealed, and it is the righteousness that only comes from faith in Jesus Christ.

In chapter four Paul cited Abraham as an example. He showed that Abraham was justified by faith when he believed God’s promise and his faith was credited to him for righteousness. Then, Paul went on to point out that Abraham was declared righteous years before he was circumcised. Obedience came after righteousness producing faith, not the other way around.

Now in this chapter he points out that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us, the Godly for the ungodly. And he said that we rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because just as the sin of one man (Adam) caused us all to be sinners (and now there is none righteous, not even one), so the righteous act of one man (Jesus) results in righteousness (justification) being available to all men. By Adam’s disobedience all were made sinners and by Jesus’ obedience many (those who believe) will be made righteous.

Romans 5:20-21

Now the Law came in so that the transgression would increase, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In these two final verses in the fifth chapter of Romans, Paul seems to anticipate an objection that might be raised against the argument he has been making. That objection is, “If sin was already in the world and man was already condemned, then what purpose did the Law serve?” That is the question that Paul is going to answer here.

The Greek word translated “came in,” literally means, “came in alongside.” You see, God did not deliver the Law as something new or to replace something else. It was delivered to stand alongside the sin guilt that already existed in man.

The real question is, “Why?” According to Paul, the Law was delivered so that the offense might “abound” or “increase.” Did it actually create more sin? No, it simply made it more obvious. It’s like turning-on a light in a dirty, dusty room. With the light off, the filth is there but it can’t be seen. When the light is turned on, the dirt and dust become obvious and undeniable. That was the purpose of the Law, to make our sinfulness obvious.

The words “**abounded all the more**” are translated from the Greek word which means, “to be in excess or to superabound.” Therefore, Paul is saying that grace was “more than in excess” or “more than superabounded.”

The greatest news in this verse, is that where sin was in abundance as a result of having had the light turned on, the grace of God did not simply more abound, it more than superabounded. When God bestows His grace to us, it is not just barely enough to cover our sin guilt, it is way more than enough. There is no question that it is more than sufficient. It was necessary for us to see our sinfulness in the light of God’s presence so that we could not deny it and so that God’s grace would be even more evident when He saved us from that sinfulness.

Once again, we see that God did not leave us out in the dark but provided us a way to freely come into the light!

Paul just taught us that the Law came in to make the presence of sin much more evident. It was the floodlight that made sin undeniable. And he said that where sin was more apparent, grace was even more so. That is, as the knowledge of sin became greater, the recognition of the immensity of the grace became even greater. To use a military analogy, the greater and more powerful the enemy, the greater the reputation of the army that conquers that enemy.

Paul now makes the final comparison. On the one hand, sin has reigned unbeatable in the past, producing death. From **2 Thessalonians 1:8-9** we know that this death is everlasting:

... on those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might,

But in the final showdown, grace will defeat the enemy. It will reign over death and through righteousness (imputed by His grace) it will produce in us eternal life. This grace which allows righteousness to be imputed to us is only made possible through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So What?

We are sinners because we are descendants from Adam. While it's true we can all blame Adam for our sinfulness, we can't blame him for our sins. AND -- because of our sins we face death. However, because of Jesus Christ, we can experience eternal life, even though we will experience physical death.

You may consider yourself as a decent person who slips-up occasionally, or you may consider yourself as a wretched sinner who deserves all that Hell can deliver. It really doesn't matter because the blood of Christ and God's free gift of salvation through faith is more than enough to cover your sin.

Once again, we should be driven to our knees in prayer giving thanks for the gift of the sinless life of Jesus and the gift of grace whereby we will one day stand in the glorious presence of God as righteous saints, not as condemned sinners!

Anyone who has honestly faced the fact of their own sinfulness knows that they are not just a little bit of a sinner. We know how great our sinfulness really is. But God's grace is more than enough to cover all of our filthy sinfulness. Praise God!

Thank you, Heavenly Father for helping me see my sinfulness and for your gracious gift, the blood of your only begotten son that paid for my sins. Thank you, Heavenly Father, for the promise of eternal life rather than the eternal punishment that I deserve. Truly, you are worthy of my worship and my praise! You are my Owner, my Master, and my Lord, and I gladly submit my will to yours. Amen

Let's pray.