**Romans**

**Lesson 9**: **The Grace of God Romans 5:12-21**

In his letter to the Romans, Paul teaches the early church what it means to be a Christian. True Christianity is based on the gospel—that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world, arose from the grave, and ascended into heaven. In and through this gospel righteousness from God has   
been revealed (1:16-17). In the first four chapters, Paul unfolds God’s case against mankind.   
God has revealed Himself, His eternal power, and His divine nature to the entire world, but man suppresses the truth and chooses to go his own way (1:19-20). In rebellion, man refuses to worship God in favor of worshipping God’s created things. Thus, God gives mankind over to   
his sinful desires (1:21-32). Paul shows clearly that all people are sinners—whether religious or irreligious. He illustrates sin’s complete and thorough depravity and how it affects every aspect of man’s being—both mind and heart (3:10-18). Knowing that men desire to seek God their   
own way, Paul reveals the one way of salvation, imputed (credited) righteousness from God   
that comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe (3:22).

Paul explains the gospel: God is willing to declare a man righteous the moment he believes and desires to receive God’s abundant provision of grace. From that moment, he is reconciled to God. Paul uses both Abraham and David to illuminate that salvation cannot be earned; it is received freely by grace. Scripture tells us, “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him   
as righteousness” (4:3; Genesis 15:6). Credited righteousness is available to all who believe (4:23-25). This justification by faith brings peace with God, gives access to His grace, and causes rejoicing in anticipation of the coming glory of God. This is the hope of every believer who has been reconciled to God (5:10-11), which brings us to the second half of chapter 5.

In this portion of his letter, Paul desires to show how much more powerfully the grace of God works in the world compared to sin. Furthermore, he wants to show how much more effective the one act of Christ is compared to the one act of Adam. He begins again with the word “therefore” to remind readers to look back at the prior section of his letter (verses 1-11). Paul continues his theme of “how much more.” If God saved us when we were his enemies, *how much more* shall he save us now that we are his friends (5:10)? If we were reconciled to God   
by Jesus’ death, *how much more* shall we be saved by his life (5:11)?

In the very beginning, when God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he told them   
they were free to eat from any tree except one—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warned them they would die if they ate from this tree (Genesis 2:15-17). This was a test to see   
if they would remain faithful to him, and their obedience would be the sign of their faithfulness. But they gave in to temptation and ate from the forbidden tree and, at that moment, something horrific happened to the world—death entered.

In chapter 5, Paul calls to mind Adam and Eve in Genesis. His motivation is to explain to believers in Rome, as well as to us, how this one act affected everyone. Paul explains, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this   
way death came to all men, because all sinned” (verse 12). Wow! That seems unfair! Paul must answer the ultimate question, “Why do all of us have to die due to one man’s sin?” He explains   
a fundamental principle that sounds strange to western culture. In the west, we are highly individualistic and assume a person’s success or failure ultimately corresponds to his actions.   
In other words, each individual is responsible for his own choices, actions, and consequences that follow. However, in the Bible, God sanctions a principle known to theologians as “federal headship.” A federal head represents, or stands for, someone else. It is similar to the power and responsibility given to elected representatives. The elected officials represent people who trust them in matters dealing with the government. Choices made by representatives are binding on the group of people who voted them into office. Consequently, their decisions impact the people they represent. This is what is meant by federal headship.

Adam was our elected “federal head.” You are probably thinking, “Well, I didn’t elect him,” which is true. But God did, and no one can choose better than God. You cannot say you would have responded differently. So, whatever choices and decisions Adam made were binding on us all. It is as if we made that same decision in Adam. Hence, when Adam sinned, we sinned. He represented the entire human race.

Federal headship is good news. Why? Think about it. If we had to represent ourselves before God, our case would be helpless. We are all guilty of sin. However, God provided another way—a federal head to stand in our place as our representative. Thus, “Adam…was a pattern of the one to come” (v. 14). Just as Adam represented us and failed, Jesus represented us and was victorious.

Though Adam was a pattern of the one to come, Jesus Christ, there are significant differences in what they accomplished. The gift of grace is not like the trespass. The gift of grace overwhelms sin—it is that simple. God’s grace has infinitely more impact for good than does sin for evil. As Keller puts it,

The results of the two deeds are opposite. First, Adam’s resulted in “death” (v 15), while Christ’s results in “life.” Here is the first of the two consequences of evil listed in the beginning of the passage: physical death. The effects of Christ’s deed undo the effects of Adam’s. Second, Adam’s deed resulted in “condemnation” (v 16), and Christ’s in “justification.” This is the second of the two consequences of evil listed in verse 12: legal guilt. Again, the effects of Christ’s deed undo the effects of Adam’s. Third, the result of Adam’s sin is that “death reigns” (v 17); but Paul doesn’t say that in Christ “life reigns,” but rather that we “reign in life” (v 17). This is another contrast Paul is making. Before, death reigned over us and we were in bondage. Now we are free. The old kingdom within which we labored crushed us, but we have not traded in one slavery for another one just like it. Rather, in the new kingdom of Christ we become kings ourselves! Christ’s kingship makes us kings, but sin’s kingship makes us slaves. The contrast is total.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Paul goes to great lengths to show that the power and scope of Christ’s deed far surpass Adam’s. In verses 15 and 17, Paul writes “how much more” to demonstrate that God’s grace overpowers sin and its effect on mankind. Paul continues,

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. (vv. 18-19)

Paul does not say Christ’s death on the cross, His act of obedience, brought justification to all men but rather the *opportunity* for all men to be justified. He is not contradicting the gospel message that righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe (3:22). Paul is saying that *for all who truly believe*, Christ’s one act of obedience reverses all the consequences of Adam’s one act of disobedience. Grace overwhelmingly defeats sin. No matter how sinful a man may be, grace can still overwhelm. Paul concludes, “But where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (v. 20). Grace reigns and brings forth righteousness. Grace brings eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. That is the heart of the gospel.

DAY 1. Read Romans 5:12-21.

1. Count and circle the number of times you find the words “one” and “reign.” Paul saw   
   two men reigning over two different kingdoms. Adam reigns over the kingdom of fallen mankind, while Christ reigns over the new kingdom of redeemed mankind. Explain how   
   we are identified with Adam and how one can be identified with Christ.
2. Read Genesis 3:4-17. What was the consequence of Adam’s sin (5:12)? Explain how   
   you see this in the world today.
3. Romans 5:12 says, “In this way death came to all men, because all sinned.” This verse means, literally, “All have sinned in Adam’s sin.” Was it fair to condemn the whole   
   world just because of one man’s sin? (Consider: What would have happened if God had tested you?)
4. (Challenge Question) Verse 14 says, “Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam.” What is the significance of Paul’s statement? (Hint: Remember, the law was not given until the time of Moses. How can someone be guilty if they do not have the law? You cannot transgress the law if it doesn’t exist. So, what do these deaths prove about man’s link to Adam’s sin and, thus, man’s guilt?)

DAY 2 . Read Romans 5:12-21.

1. Paul uses the phrase “how much more” in verses 9, 10, 15, and 17. What is Paul trying to convey regarding God’s grace? How much more has a believer gained through faith than he had lost? (Hint: list what man lost in Adam and what he gains through faith in Jesus Christ. See John 1:12, 3:16, 15:5; Romans 8:1, 17, 28, 31, 35-39; 1 Corinthians 15:42-43, 50-57; Ephesians 2:19-22; Philippians 3:20, 4:13; Colossians 1:14, 2:10; Hebrews 11:16)
2. Just as condemnation and death came through one man to mankind, what is offered to all mankind through another man (verses 15-17)? Is it fair for God to offer salvation to all mankind because of one man’s obedience (1 Corinthians 15:22)?

DAYS 3 and 4. Read Romans 5:15-21.

1. What does Paul mean by “how much more will those who receive God’s abundant   
   provision of grace and the gift of righteousness **reign in life** through the one man, Jesus Christ” (v. 17)?
   1. What does it mean to reign in life (Romans 6:14, 16-17; 8:9; 2 Corinthians 5:17)?
   2. When does this reign begin (Ephesians 2:5-7; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 22:5)?
2. What key word in verse 17 describes how a man obtains God’s grace (John 1:12)?   
   Have you done this?
3. Verse 18 says, “Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.”(Be careful not to interpret this verse to mean *all* are saved by Jesus’ one act of obedience. One must never interpret a single verse or passage of Scripture without taking   
   the rest of the Bible into account.)
   1. What was the one act of righteousness that makes justification possible for all men (Romans 5:8)?
   2. What does justification bring to a believer?
   3. How would you define the *life* that only Jesus can give (John 4:13-14; 10:10; 11:25-26; 14:6)?
4. According to verse 19, what one word characterizes the life of Jesus (Philippians 2:8)?   
   What one word characterizes the life of men (Romans 10:21)?
5. According to verse 20, “the law was added so that the trespass might increase.”   
   Explain. (Hint: think about what happens when you tell a child not to do something.)
6. Verse 20 continues, “But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.” Explain.
7. Verse 21 says, “So that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
   1. Define God’s grace.
   2. An important word in Romans 5 is “reign” (vv. 14, 17, 21). Let’s consider a few questions from John Stott:

Who reigns today? Who is on the throne? Before Christ came, the throne was occupied by sin and death (14, 17), and the world was strewn with corpses. But since Christ came, the throne has been occupied by grace and by those who have received grace, and their reign is characterized by life (17, 21). Verse 21 sums up God’s purpose **that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.** Is this our vision? In our view of ultimate reality, who is occupying the throne today?...is guilt still reigning, and death? Or is grace reigning, and life?[[2]](#footnote-2)

Have you received God’s abundant provision of grace (5:17)? If yes, how do you see this manifested in your life?

1. What is the most important lesson you have learned from this chapter? How has it changed your life?

1. Keller, 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Stott, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)