

UNASHAMED

A study of the book of Romans

I am not ashamed of the **GOSPEL**, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Romans 1:16

April 18, 2021
Romans 5:12-21

¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—

¹³ To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! ¹⁶ Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, ²¹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

COMMENTARY

5:12. This is the key verse in the whole section, especially the phrase because all sinned. Paul seemed to anticipate the centuries of dialogue and debate—even disagreement—that would take place over his words because all sinned. It is following these words that he breaks off his sentence and pens verses 12-17 to offer the needed supporting materials. Paul clearly says that sin entered the world through one man, meaning Adam. Genesis 3 demonstrates Adam’s leadership (not Eve’s; see Luke 3:38; 1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13) and fatherhood of—and thus responsibility for—the human family. Death came through sin—again, clear from Genesis. In chapter 3 Adam died spiritually, and in Genesis 5:5 he died physically. It is the spreading of death through sin, and death spreading to all men, because all sinned, that is difficult. But the point is made here by Paul that when Adam sinned, he lost peace with God. Somehow, that sin spread to all people descended from Adam since all sinned, which means that everyone in the human race lost their peace with God as well.

5:13-14. Three options have been presented for how all sinned. First, Paul could mean that “all sinned” as he said they did in Romans 3:23. In that context, Paul is talking about individual sins, and in 5:12 he would mean that because all have sinned like Adam sinned (whether by tendency or example), all have died like Adam died. The primary problem with this position is set forth in verses 13-14: sin is only known as a result of transgressing the law; sin is not taken into account where there is no law. In spite of there being no revealed law of God from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, people still died. Therefore, “all sinned” does not mean that they committed individual sins (though they did) as a basis for judgment since there was no revealed standard from Adam to Moses.

A second meaning for “all sinned” could be that all inherited from Adam a tendency to sin (a sin nature) and knowingly sinned by violating the moral code of God written on the heart (see Rom. 2:15) and thus died. The chief problem with this view is that those who are not morally accountable, such as infants and the mentally infantile, die without having knowingly violated any standard of God, written or unwritten. Whether humans have inherited a sin nature from Adam is not questioned; we have. The question is whether this is the basis for Paul’s words “death came to all men, because all sinned” (v. 12).

The only way to account for those who died from Adam to Moses, and those who die without moral knowledge of sinning, is the third view: that when Adam sinned, humanity sinned in him. This is confirmed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:22 where he says, “in Adam all die.” Likewise, in Romans 5:8 Paul said that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” How could Christ die for the actual sins of those who had not yet been born? Finally, in Romans 5:18 Paul will say even more plainly that “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men,” period.

Paul’s whole argument in this section of Romans is based on headship: Adam, as the head of the human race, sinned and God saw in Adam the whole human race as guilty. Conversely, the second Adam, Jesus Christ is the head of a new spiritual race. Christ did not sin, and God saw in Christ’s innocence all who unite themselves to him by faith as likewise innocent. Our being declared guilty in Adam is no more on the basis of our “sins” than being declared innocent in Christ is on the basis of our “not sins.” In both cases, headship is the cause. Those who think it unjust of God to lump them into Adam’s sin might consider whether they should think it just for God to lump them into Christ’s righteousness. Whether from Adam to Moses or from Moses to now, Paul says that the human race lost its peace with God as a result of guilt inherited from Adam. Thankfully, we were not left in that state; our peace with God has been won back for us by the second Adam, the explanation of which Paul now begins.

5:15. Adam’s act of sin caused the human race to become guilty before God; Christ’s acts of obedience (His years of daily obedience plus His final act of sacrificial obedience) created the potential for all human beings to have their guilt erased before God. Therefore, their actions and results are contrasted (in five ways) instead of compared. First, Paul contrasts the sin of Adam with the gift of Christ. Paul’s focus regarding Adam’s sin is that “death came to all men” (v. 12) as a result. Therefore, if all Christ’s obedience did was to reverse what Adam lost, then all would simply live forever and not die. But the gift (of righteousness; see v. 17) that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, resulted in much more. In fact, in the earlier part of this chapter, Paul highlights what some of the much more is: peace, access to God, hope in the future, eternal life. All that the grace of God brings to humankind is what came through the gift that Christ procured.

5:16. Next, Paul contrasts the timing of Adam’s condemnation with the timing of the gift of Christ’s righteousness. This is another aspect of the “much more” of the gift of righteousness mentioned in the previous verse. Here is Paul’s argument: God’s judgment of Adam followed only one sin and brought condemnation. But after thousands of years of history and billions of sins committed by multiplied millions of people, God still, by His grace, gave the human race the gift of justification (righteousness) through the death and resurrection of Christ.

5:17. Third, Paul contrasts the reign of death with the reign of life. Adam’s kingdom of life was short-lived. Whatever amount of time he spent in the Garden of Eden prior to

sinning was the extent of his kingdom of life. After he sinned, death reigned in his world and all of his descendants died (Gen. 5:1-32; 9:28). One need only fast forward a few thousand years and insert his or her parents' or grandparents' names in the list to see that the reign of death continues. But the new reign, the reign of the One who is life (John 14:6), Jesus Christ, has come through His obedience to God. Paul says that Christ "must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:25-26). That is why the believer in Christ reigns with Christ, for the believer does not fear death. The believer in Christ knows that because the reign of "death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54), we can join Paul in mocking death: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55). Not only do we live and reign with Christ now positionally; we will one day reign with Him literally (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 22:5).

5:18-19. Fourth, the one trespass of Adam is contrasted with the one act of righteousness of Christ. Both death and life were the result of one act: one an act of sin, the other an act of righteousness. The condemnation of the former and the blessing of the latter flow to all who are "in" their representative head. All human beings are in Adam physically, so all die. But not all human beings are in the second Adam spiritually, so not all live. Those descendants of the first Adam for whom "there is now no condemnation" are those who are in the second Adam, "in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). And the way a descendant of the first Adam gets to be "in" the second Adam is by receiving "God's abundant provision of grace" (Rom. 5:17; see also John 1:12; Acts 2:38; 1 Tim. 1:16).

5:20-21. Finally, Paul contrasts law with grace. Content-wise, this is ground the apostle has already covered (Rom. 3:20-31). But he summarizes the place of the law in the discussion in anticipation of one of his readers asking, "What about the law?" In other words, he has already said that those living from Adam to Moses (those without the law) are as guilty as those living after Moses. Jews saw the giving of the law, and its corollary impact on the moral, civil, and ceremonial aspects of the nation, as the single most important distinctive of their nation. And Paul seemed to be saying that it was irrelevant in the current discussion. "Not so," Paul will say. The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But the law did not make anyone more or less righteous, because all sinned in Adam.

But the law did do this: by making the trespass increase, it became a vehicle for demonstrating the "much more" of the grace of God to overcome the sin which the law revealed. This aspect of Paul's final section of Romans 5 is a fitting conclusion to his treatise comparing Adam and Christ. Nothing is greater than the grace of God.

MAIN POINT

Sin brings death, but Christ gives life.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

How would you define “grace”?

Besides your relationship with Jesus, is there another relationship in your life that has taught you about the nature of grace? Who was it with? What did it teach you?

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 5:12-14.

How did Paul illustrate the problem of sin and God’s plan for fixing it?

What do you most remember about the story of Adam and the fall of man (Gen. 3:1-24)?

How has the sin of Adam affected his descendants to the present day?

Verse 12 marks the beginning of Paul’s discussion of Adam and Jesus that extends through verse 19. This contrast reflects two of Paul’s major points in the letter so far. First, all humanity is guilty of sin and deserving of death (1:18–3:20). Adam’s sin brought about this condition. Second, God makes salvation available through the obedience and sacrifice of another Man, His Son Jesus Christ (3:21–5:11). We all choose to follow one or the other, and we all endure or enjoy the consequences of that decision.

How did you first become aware that you needed God’s grace? How long did it take you to accept His grace? What hurdles did you have to move beyond in order to do so?

- HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 5:15-17.

How is Jesus’ work similar to Adam’s? How is it different?

How did Jesus’ work affect our standing with God?

How would you sum up these verses in your own words?

Paul showed the depth of our reconciliation by using a comparison of Adam and Christ. Adam, as one man, brought death and sin into the world. Christ, also as one Man, brought a free gift of grace. Adam's sin was one choice that caused many deaths, the gift on the other hand was one death that covered many sins. This death brought justification and reconciliation to believers.

Read verses 15-17 again. Who does Paul say Jesus' work on the cross is for?

What must one do to benefit from what Christ did?

According to verse 17, what is the result of receiving God's gifts of grace and righteousness? What do you understand this to mean?

The important conclusion is that God brings justification through His grace. "To be justified" means "to be made innocent." God imparts His grace to a sinner, which completely transforms that sinner into a holy and fully accepted son or daughter of God. As Christians we have received a verdict of "justified." We live with the assurance God accepts us through Jesus Christ.

- HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 5:18-21.

Read Romans 5:1-11. What are the benefits of God's grace, made available to us through Jesus Christ?

How do the benefits of God's grace enjoyed now prepare you for the life to come?

Christ accomplished salvation for us through His one righteous act. The phrase refers to Christ's dying on the cross and also carries the idea of Christ's full obedience. The whole of His life was one constant act of obedience. Christ's righteous act made it possible for us to be made righteous. Under the one man Adam we were once slaves to sin and death. We may have wanted to live righteously, but as slaves to sin, we failed. When we choose the gift offered by the other Man, Christ, He justifies us, declares us righteous, and by His Spirit in us gives us the power to live lives of righteousness.

Why is sin no match for God's grace? Why are so many people overwhelmed by sin?

How can God's grace, not sin, have the last word in our lives?

How does understanding the work of Adam and the work of Jesus affect your heart toward God?

By understanding the gravity of the sin and the greatness of the gift, we can see the glory of God's love. By knowing God and what He has done for us, we have freedom to follow His commands, to praise Him, and to live a life for His glory.

NEXT STEPS

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What would you say to someone who believes God's grace can't provide forgiveness for his or her sins? Is that different than what you tell yourself? If so, how?

What can you do this week to keep the reality of your reconciliation to God present in your thoughts? How might your week look differently if you do?

Does the gospel message excite you as it did Paul? Why or why not? What could help you experience its life and vitality again?

How can our group hold each other accountable to both focus on the gospel and share it with someone else this week?

PRAYER

Pray that the people in your group would understand their need for a Savior and trust fully in Christ because of the price He paid for them. Pray for our church, that believers will encourage one another in their walks and that they would share the good news of God's grace with non-believers. Pray that as a group you will glorify God in your daily lives.