

The Basis Of Our Justification:
Dead In Adam; Alive In Christ

(Romans 5:12-21)

Intro: Having looked at the four blessings that accompany our justification in Romans 5:1-11, Paul concludes this section with a discussion of the basis for our justification in Romans 5:12-21. Paul you recall has been teaching the Gospel or good news about God's gracious gift of justification, a right standing before God and the assurance of future glory, by faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ alone. He has been using a form of argumentation called *diatribe*, where he responds to questions raised by an imaginary Jewish opponent. The primary question throughout this section has been, "Can faith alone, faith in One Person and His sacrificial death on the cross, really see a believer through to glory?" That is, "Can faith alone, in Christ alone secure a person's eternal glory?" The answer Paul gives is, "Yes, faith in Jesus Christ is the only basis of securing justification and eternal life.

In the passage before us, Romans 5:12-21, Paul shows that just as surely as Adam's sin brings condemnation and death to all men; Christ's death on Calvary's cross brings justification and life to all who receive Him. This is a difficult passage to understand, but it is well worth the effort.

The key to understanding this passage rests in *our identification with Adam and Christ*. The little word *one* is used eleven times in this section. Every person in the world today is identified with *one* of these two men, Adam or Christ. These two men represent two team captains if you will. And all of us are on one team or the other, team Adam or team Christ. Furthermore, every one of us, every person in the world, reaps the consequences of what our respective team captain has done. The question is, what have these two men done, and what are the consequences of being identified with them.

One further note, Paul begins with Adam and ends with Jesus Christ. He presents the bad news first: that sin and death entered the world through one man, Adam, and death spread to all men because all sinned (v. 12). He concludes in verse 21, that just "as sin reigned in death [because of Adam], even so God's grace has super-abounded through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

I. Adam: The Entrance Of Sin And Death (vv. 12-14)

v. 12—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 —

This is not a complete sentence, is it? This is a *contrastive sentence* that calls for “**even so.**” Paul sets out to contrast the consequences of Adam’s sin, with God’s gracious gift of justification made available in Jesus Christ, but as usual, he gets sidetracked. All of **verses 13-18a** are one long parenthesis (). If you look down to the middle of verse 18 you will see the words, “**even so.**” You might want to circle the words “even so,” and draw a line back up to verse 12, because this is actually the completion of the thought Paul began in verse 12. Everything from verse 13 to the middle of this 18th verse is a parenthetical aside, or a digression in Paul’s major thought.

Alright, let’s get back to the truth Paul introduces in verse 12. He begins by describing the entrance of sin into the world, and its awful consequences on mankind. The teaching or doctrine of “Original Sin” is derived from this very passage. This is the teaching that sin entered into the world through one man, obviously Adam. He is introduced as the man in verse 14. Sin was unknown in the world before Adam chose to disobey God’s prohibition not to eat “from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17).

The consequences of Adam’s sin were immediate and tragic. He suffered an instantaneous inherent, constitutional change. He became a sinful person, with a sinful nature and disposition toward sin. In addition, his sin resulted in death. He died spiritually—he became separated from God and the intimate fellowship he had enjoyed with Him from the moment of his creation. He was driven from the Garden of Eden, and eventually suffered physically death, as well.

The consequences of Adam’s sin were passed on to his descendants. Every person born from Adam’s day to this very day has inherited Adam’s disposition to sin. That’s what it means to be born in sin. Skeptics reject this teaching. They insist that it is not fair for God to condemn mankind because of Adam’s sin. Many deny the doctrine of “Original Sin,” and argue that the biblical teaching that all men are sinners is ridiculous.

I came across a really interesting report from the Minnesota Crime Commission, which concludes that every baby is a delinquent from birth. And I quote: “Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-

centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it: his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toys, his uncle's wrist-watch, or whatever. Deny him these and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He's dirty, he has no morals, no knowledge, no developed skills. This means that all children, not just certain children but all children, are born delinquents. If permitted to continue in their self-centered world of infancy, given free rein to their impulsive actions to satisfy each and every want, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, and a rapist.”

Keep in mind that that report was issued by a secular group. It is interesting to note how close they came to a true biblical definition of Original Sin.

The tragic truth is that sin and death spread to all men because all sinned in Adam. This is what theologians refer to as **Federal Headship** or **Seminal Headship**. This simply means that every one of us existed in seed or seminal form in Adam. As the representative head of the human race, when Adam sinned, we all sinned in Adam. Unfortunately, the sin of Adam was imputed, charged to the account of, every person. The guilt and penalty of Adam's sin has been passed on to every one of his descendants. Imputation of sin is charged to every human being because we are all connected to Adam.

The good news of course is that just as Adam's sin is imputed/charged to every person's account, God graciously imputes the righteousness of Jesus Christ to the account of everyone who believes in Him for salvation (v. 17).

v. 17—“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.”

Whereas we were condemned and dead in Adam, our racial head, we are now **much better off** because of our justification, being declared righteous—*in right standing with God*—through our Head, Jesus Christ.

This leads to another question, **verse 13, “Can sin exist without law?”**

vv. 13-14—For until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

In other words, how can sin be charged against men from the time of Adam to Moses when there was no law in place which would render men accountable? While sin is not imputed or charged as a violation of a specific command when there is no law, men were none-the-less guilty of sinning against God and one another. Sin was present even though the law had not yet been given. Sin is lawlessness and rebellion against God. In chapter 2 Paul explained “As many as sinned without the law, shall perish without the law. And if men have sinned under the law, then they shall be judged by the law.” All men are guilty sinners descended from Adam. The fact that death reigned from Adam to Moses proves that all men suffer as sinners under the federal headship of Adam.

Having introduced his major premise that all men are sinners condemned in Adam, Paul next supports his argument with several contrasts between Adam’s sin and Christ’s act of obedience on the cross.

II. Adam And Christ Contrasted (vv. 15-17)

A. Adam’s offense is contrasted with Christ’s free gift (v. 15)

15 But the free 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.

The free gift of Christ is not like the transgression/sin of Adam. The sin of Adam spread spiritual and physical death to the entire human race. **Much more**, God’s gracious gift provided the way of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ, for all who receive Him by faith (John 10:10).

B. Adam’s judgment and condemnation is contrasted with Christ’s justification (v. 16)

v. 16—Again, the gift of God 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 free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification.

Paul’s second contrast highlights how Adam’s one sin resulted in judgment and condemnation spreading to all men. Through Christ’s death on the cross, however, the free gift of God results in justification—being declared righteous through faith in Christ.

C. Adam's reign in death is contrasted with Christ's reign in life (v. 17)

v. 17—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.

Because of Adam's sin, death reigned and continues to reign in all unsaved men. Individuals who choose to remain in Adam can be assured that they will reap the results of sin, which is eternal death. On the other hand, God graciously provides **much more** to those who choose to receive the abundance of His grace and the gift of righteousness through His Son, Jesus Christ, for they will reign in life everlasting. This refers to ruling with Christ in eternal life, as well as, enjoying His abundant Spirit-powered life here and now. This is the kind of life that equips believers with the ability to live above their circumstances, and to grow through their struggles.

III. Adam And Christ Compared (vv. 18-21)

When we come to verse 18, we see that Paul returns to his main thought, from which he digressed in verses 13-17.

v. 18—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.

Just as Adam's one transgression resulted in condemnation to all men, *even so* through Christ's one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. To all men who receive Christ by faith, as verse 17 makes clear.

The comparison here is to the effect Adam and Christ had on their respective followers. Whereas Adam's one sin constituted all men sinners condemned to death, *even so*, Christ's one act of obedience in going to the cross constitutes all those who believe on Him as righteous. They are justified, declared to be right with God. Paul reinforces and clarifies this point in the next verse, 19

19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, *even so* through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

Adam's one act of disobedience to God's prohibition resulted in the many being made sinners. The *many* here refers to all mankind. *Even so*, here is our

comparison, through the obedience of the One, Jesus Christ, the many will be made righteous. The *many* here refers not to all men but to all those who believe in Jesus Christ. Christ's obedience constitutes righteous, all those who place their faith in or believe in Him.

IV. Law And Grace Contrasted (vv. 20-21)

Paul closes this section of Romans with his most treasured theme—divine grace. God's grace superabounds to believers through Jesus Christ!

A. Grace abounding (v. 20)

v. 20—And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded **all the more**.

Paul's Jewish opponent would say at this juncture, "What is the Law for?" Paul explains that the Law came in to show man how great a sinner he is. God gave the Law through Moses, not to save men, but to reveal man's need for His grace. Salvation, being made right with God, has always been by grace through faith in God alone. Paul adds, that whereas the Law caused sin to increase, God's grace abounded **all the more**. In other words, where sin abounded, God's grace superabounded, so that through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, believers are rescued/delivered from sin and death.

B. Grace reigning through Jesus Christ our Lord (v. 21)

Paul began this section in verse 12 with Adam, sin, and death, he concludes here in verse 21 with Jesus Christ our Lord, who graciously provides believers with righteousness resulting in eternal life.

21 that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Chuck Swindoll introduces this section of Romans 5:12-21 with a nursery rhyme that most of us probably learned as children, Humpty Dumpty. It goes like this:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
 Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
 All the king's horses and all the king's men
 Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again.

This simple nursery rhyme captures Paul's point here in Romans 5:12-21. He reminds us that Adam, who sat on the wall of innocence and enjoyed perfect fellowship with God, suffered a great fall that resulted in condemnation and death to him and all his descendants. However, unlike Humpty Dumpty, God has graciously provided the means for men to be put back together again, when they place their faith in the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Conclusion:

Chuck Swindoll summarizes this section, along with the first five chapters of Romans with an answer to Humpty Dumpty's dilemma:

Jesus Christ came to our wall,
Jesus Christ died for our fall;
So that regardless of death and in spite of our sin,
Through grace, he might put us together again (*Romans 1-5, 63*)

We are all born in Adam, and as such, we are sinners condemned to death. There is only one way to overcome our lost estate in Adam, we must accept God's gracious gift of justification by placing our faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

If there is any doubt in your mind over the issue of having invited Jesus Christ into your heart, will you ask Him to come into your heart as I close in prayer?

Let's Pray