

## XI. The Two Adams

February 16/17/18, 2016

Romans 5:12-21

**Aim:** To appreciate that all men are sinners and sentenced to death due to the disobedience of their first father Adam; whereas all those who are in union with Christ receive grace and life through the obedience of the ‘Last Adam.’

Romans 5 is not a dangling participle, having no relationship to what comes before and after. Paul is laboring over further critical implications of the doctrine of justification. In a real sense, the whole epistle of Romans is Paul’s explanation of the full-orbed significance of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, but in chapter 5 he is giving us the contrast between our state of ruin brought about through Adam and our state of justification brought about by the obedience of another. The contrast here is between Adam and Christ, and it all has to do with justification.

It is universally agreed that the passage before us is one of the greatest theological sections in the entire Bible. In its ten verses Paul summarizes the theology of the preceding chapters about the lostness of man and his rescue through God’s provision.

In a passage that rivals 3:21-26 for theological importance, Paul paints with broad brushstrokes a ‘birds-eye’ picture of the history of redemption. His canvas is human history, and the scope is universal. We hear nothing in this paragraph of ‘Jew’ and ‘Gentile’; both are subsumed under the larger category ‘human being.’ The perspective is corporate rather than individual. All people, Paul teaches, stand in relationship to one of two men, whose actions determine the eternal destiny of all who belong to them. Either one ‘belongs to’ Adam and is under sentence of death because of his sin, or disobedience, or one belongs to Christ and is assured of eternal life because of His ‘righteous’ act, or obedience. The actions of Adam and Christ, then, are similar in having ‘epochal’ significance. But they are not equal in power, for Christ’s act is able completely to overcome the effect of Adam’s. The power of Christ’s act of obedience to overcome Adam’s act of disobedience is the great theme of this paragraph. The universal consequences of Adam’s sin are the *assumption* of Paul’s argument; the power of Christ’s act to cancel those consequences is its *goal*.

This will be the first time in Romans that Paul has talked about the entrance of sin into the world through the Fall of Adam. Remember that Paul has already explained why mankind needs salvation (1:18-3:20), yet he did so without even mentioning Adam and Eve. As Paul explains mankind’s need for salvation, the emphasis is on how individual humans have turned away from God. He talks about people knowing the truth and deliberately turning away from it in culture after culture; serving the creature rather than the Creator; sinning against their own moral standards. Now, in chapter 5, he will give the root explanation for all of this. The bottom-line reason that all people are sinners, Paul now shows, is because of the historical Fall of mankind in Adam. And when one denies the historicity of Adam, one throws away the authority of Paul. As Paul begins explaining how sin entered the world, he insists very strenuously that Adam was a real historical person.

What is the relationship between 5:12-21 and the previous course of Paul’s argument? The main connection is with the teaching of assurance of final salvation in the immediately preceding paragraph (vv. 2b, 9-10). The passage shows why those who have been justified and reconciled can be so certain that they will be saved from wrath and share in ‘the glory of God’: it is because Christ’s act of obedience ensures eternal life for all those who are ‘in Christ.’

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Romans 5:12-21 addresses two human crises, Sin and Death. We must notice that ‘sin’ (*hamartia*) is uniformly used in the singular. Paul is not speaking of individual sins but of Adam’s great Sin, his act of rebellion against God in which all his descendants participated. It is likely that by ‘death’ Paul means more than biological death. The contrastive bracketing of ‘death’ with ‘eternal life’ (5:21; 6:23) suggests that Paul means his readers to understand by ‘death,’ ‘*eternal death*.’ These twin crises of Sin and Death were created by the first man (long before Law was given), but those crises were resolved by another man, Jesus Christ (long after Law was given). While the commandments in the Law defined Sin, and even provoked Sin, the fact is that Law served only to condemn Sin – Adam’s and ours. Law did nothing positive or redemptive. Accordingly, the immediate intention of this passage is to address those Jews who wished to reinstate Law as a non-negotiable part of the gospel of God. Paul will have none of this.

A growing movement called the ‘new perspective on Paul’ has been pervasive in the Christian community, even among evangelicals. It denies the imputation of the righteousness of Christ as the grounds for our justification. There is no place in the Bible where the doctrine of imputation is set forth more clearly and centrally than here in Romans 5. I can find no other way to make sense of the way in which Paul says that we sinned in Adam than to understand this assertion putatively, i.e., we sinned in Adam by imputation. Paul labors the point that Adam’s sin is reckoned and transferred, that is, imputed, to the entire human race. We know he is talking about imputation here, because he spends time drawing the remarkable contrast that just as one man’s offense and sin were reckoned to the entire human race, so another man’s righteousness, in a similar manner, was imputed to all who believe.

### A. The Failure of the First Adam (Romans 5:12-14)

Verses 12-14 lay the foundation for the remainder of the chapter by pointing out the obvious truth that death is universal to the human race. In these three verses Paul focuses on Adam and the reign of death that his sin engendered. In the remainder of the chapter (vv. 15-21), he focuses on Christ and the reign of life.

Paul is arguing that because of Adam’s sin, both sin and death are universal because the guilt of Adam is reckoned to the whole race. We are dealing unassailably with the doctrine of imputation in its worst possible manifestation. The imputation of guilt from one person to all whom he represents leads us to ruination, our present estate as fallen and corrupt sinners.

In view of the universality of mortality, the questions come to mind, ‘Why does death reign in the world? Why must everyone die? How did death become the undisputed victor over mankind?’ Paul gives the answer to those questions in the present text. And although the basic truths he presents are in themselves rather simple, his argument in defense of them is not. His divinely-inspired reasoning plunges the reader deep into mysteries that we will never fully understand until we one day see our Lord face to face. The primary purpose of this passage, however, is not to explain why all people die. Paul brings in the subject of death merely to establish the principle that one person’s deeds can inexorably affect many other people. Paul’s primary objective in this chapter is to show how one Man’s death provided salvation for many, and to do so the apostle first shows the reasonableness of that truth since one man’s sin produced condemnation for many. The analogy of Adam and Christ is antithetical, an analogy of opposites. Because of Adam’s sin, all men are condemned; because of Christ’s obedience, many

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are pardoned. Adam is therefore analogous to Christ only in regard to the common principle that what one man did affected countless others.

### 1. Sin and Death (5:12)

The opening words of the paragraph, ‘because of this,’ suggest that what Paul is about to teach in 5:12-21 is the conclusion he is drawing from something he has argued earlier in the letter. We must question whether 5:12-21 reads most naturally as the *conclusion* of what Paul has already argued. The verses make better sense when viewed as the *basis* for what has just been said; specifically, based on content alone, 5:12-21 would seem to function very nicely as the ground, or reason, for the confidence in hope that Paul has stressed in 5:1-11. We would then paraphrase the transition at 5:12 as follows: ‘in order to accomplish this [namely that God has promised to save all those who are justified and reconciled through Christ], there exists a life-giving union between Christ and His own that is similar to, but more powerful than, the death-producing union between Adam and all his own.’

Verse 12 is neatly balanced chiasm:

- A. Sin (12a) produces
- B. Death (12b);
- B’. All die (12c)
- A. Because all sin (12d).

Verse 12 describes mankind’s ruin in just twenty-five English words.

#### a) *The Origin of Sin (5:12a)*

<sup>12</sup>*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man...*

The first clause attributes the entrance of sin into the world to ‘one man.’ This ‘man,’ is, of course, Adam, whose very name means ‘man.’ Paul personifies sin, picturing it as a power that holds sway in the world outside Christ, bringing disaster and death on all humanity. In the present instance, the ‘sin’ that enters the world is more than an individual sin; it is the bridgehead that paves the way for ‘sinning’ as a condition of humanity. The fact that Paul attributes to Adam this sin is significant since he certainly knows from Genesis that the woman, Eve, sinned first (cp. 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14). Already we see that Adam is being given a status in salvation history that is not tied only to temporal priority.

Paul’s straightforward statement that ‘by one man sin entered into the world’ shows he clearly believed that the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1-3 was real history (cp. also 16:20; 1 Cor. 15:22; 1 Tim. 2:13-14). Jesus also believed in the historicity of the first few chapters of Genesis (cp. Mt. 19:4-5). There is a tendency in our day to view the first three chapters of Genesis as merely myth or parable, an idea or an allegory. But considering that both Paul and Christ accepted those chapters as real history, if we reject them we are rejecting the authority not only of Paul but even of Christ Himself.

In Hebrew ‘Adam’ means *mankind*. People in Bible times understood that the human race has a corporate solidarity in Adam. Thus all mankind was present and actually sinned in Adam. Adam was not a mere representative for mankind showing what we would do if we had the same temptation. *We were Adam*.

It is important to note that Paul does not say that sin originated with Adam but only that sin in the world, that is, in the human realm, began with Adam. Sin originated with Satan, who ‘has

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sinned from the beginning' (1 Jn. 3:8). Paul's argument begins with the assertion that, through Adam, 'sin entered into the world.' He does not speak of sins, plural, but of 'sin,' singular. In this sense, 'sin' does not represent a particular unrighteous act but rather the inherent propensity to unrighteousness. It was not the many other sinful acts that Adam eventually committed, but the indwelling sin *nature* that he came to possess because of his first disobedience, that he passed on to his posterity. Just as Adam bequeathed his physical nature to his posterity he also bequeathed to them his spiritual nature, which henceforth was characterized and dominated by sin. God made men a procreative race, and when they procreate they pass on to their children, and to their children's children, their own nature—physical, psychological, and spiritual.

Adam represents the entire human race that is descended from him, no matter how many subgroups there may be. Therefore, when Adam sinned, all mankind sinned, and because his first sin transformed his inner nature, that now depraved nature was also transmitted to his posterity. Because he became spiritually polluted, all his descendants would be polluted the same way. When he sinned in the Garden of Eden, he sinned not only as *a* man, but as *man*. As far as guilt is concerned, every human being was present in the garden with Adam and shares in the sin he committed there.

The fact that Adam and Eve not only were actual historical figures but were the original human beings from whom all others have descended is absolutely critical to Paul's argument here and is critical to the efficacy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If a historical Adam did not represent all mankind in sinfulness, a historical Christ could not represent all mankind in righteousness. If all men did not fall with the first Adam, all men could not be saved by Christ, the second and last Adam (see 1 Cor. 15:20-22, 45).

### *b) The Entrance of Death (5:12b)*

*...and death through sin...*

The second element of Paul's argument is that, because sin entered the world through one man, so also 'death,' the consequence of sin, entered the world through the one man's sin. God did not create Adam as a mortal being, that is, as subject to death. But he explicitly warned Adam that disobedience by eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil would make him subject to death (Gen. 2:17). And contrary to Satan's lie (Gen. 3:4), that was indeed the fate that Adam suffered for his disobedience. Death is the unending fruit of the poison that entered Adam's heart and the heart of every one of his descendants. A person does not become a sinner by committing sins but rather commits sins because he is by nature a sinner.

The unbreakable connection between sin and death, made clear in Gen. 2-3, was a staple of Jewish theology. But what does Paul mean by death here? He may refer to physical death only, since 'death' in v. 14 seems to have this meaning. But the passage goes on to contrast death with eternal life (v. 21). Moreover, in vv. 16 and 18 Paul uses 'condemnation' in the same way that he uses death here. These points suggest that Paul may refer here to 'spiritual' death: the estrangement from God that is a result of sin and that, if not healed through Christ, will lead to 'eternal' death. In fact, however, we are not forced to make a choice between these options. Paul frequently uses 'death' and related words to designate a 'physico-spiritual entity'—'total death,' the penalty incurred for sin.

Sin brings several kinds of death to men. Death is a separation, and Adam's first death was *spiritual* separation from God, which Adam experienced immediately after his disobedience. A second, and obvious, kind of death that sin brings is *physical* separation from fellow human

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beings. Adam became subject to physical death the moment he sinned. A third kind of death that sin brings is *eternal*, an immeasurably worse extension of the first. Referred to in Scripture as the second death (Rev. 21:8), this death not only brings eternal separation from God but also eternal torment in hell.

### c) *The Spread of Death (5:12c)*

*...and so death spread to all men...*

As v. 12b depicts the *entrance* of death as the consequence of sin, v. 12c makes explicit that this death has *spread* to every single person. ‘In this way’ (‘and so’) draws a comparison between the manner in which death came into the world – through sin – and the manner in which death spread to everyone – also through sin.

A third element of Paul’s argument is that death was transmitted to all men, without exception. No human being has ever escaped death. Enoch and Elijah, who escaped physical and eternal death, nevertheless were spiritually dead before they trusted in the Lord. Even Jesus died, not because of His own sin but because of the world’s sin that he vicariously took upon Himself. And when He took sin upon Himself, He also took upon Himself sin’s penalty.

### d) *The Universality of Sin (5:12d)*

*...because all sinned—*

Verse 12d has the purpose of showing that death is universal because sin is universal. Paul then, has shown that the entrance of death into the world through the sin of Adam has led to death for all people; and all people die, Paul asserts, because all people ‘sinned.’ In a sense, then, Paul’s concern in this verse, and throughout the passage, is not with ‘original sin,’ but with ‘original death.’ Paul says nothing explicitly about *how* the sin of one man, Adam, has resulted in death for everyone; nor has he made clear the connection—if any—between Adam’s sin (v. 12a) and the sin of all people (v. 12d). What he *has* made clear is that the causal nexus between sin and death, exhibited in the case of Adam, has repeated itself in the case of every human being. No one, Paul makes clear, escapes the reign of death because no one escapes the power of sin.

‘Sinned’ translates a Greek aorist tense, indicating that at one point in time all men sinned. That, of course, was the time that Adam first sinned. His sin became mankind’s sin, because all mankind were in his loins.

Sin and death spread to all men because, as the final words of verse 12 say, ‘all sinned.’ The verb ‘sinned’ is in the aorist tense, which signifies a completed action in the past. The idea is, all of us sinned in that simple completed act of Adam—no exceptions! This is the foundational statement of our human condition of ruin and a basic truth of Christian theology.

Clearly, then, Paul is teaching that all people sinned ‘in Adam’ and all people died ‘in Adam.’ It’s not merely that Adam introduced a virus called ‘sin’ that his descendants ‘catch’ so that they too sin and die. Rather, we actually sinned when he sinned and we died when he died. Paul is saying that all humankind were there acting in and with Adam. Adam was our ‘racial head’ and all humanity belongs to the covenant people of the first man who sinned against God.

## 2. Law and Death (5:13-14)

Our ruin is universal. Logically, having explained the work of the first Adam in verse 12, Paul should have gone on to contrast the work of the Second Adam against that of the first. However,

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he leaves the sentence incomplete and goes on to demonstrate that this solidarity of sin and death through Adam has remained constant throughout man's history.

Paul has already within v. 12 begun to disrupt his comparison between Adam and Christ with a series of 'run-on' clauses; now, he abandons his sentence altogether. (English versions signal this abandonment of the sentence with a dash at the end of v. 12). Paul apparently thinks that something he has said in v. 12 requires immediate elaboration in a kind of 'aside.' But what is the purpose of this 'aside', which takes up vv. 13-14?

### a) *Sin and Law (5:13)*

<sup>13</sup>*for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.*

Paul's assertion of the universality of sin and death in verse 12 is open to the objection, on the basis of Jewish beliefs, that there can be no sin, and hence no death, apart from the law. To meet this objection, Paul makes clear that even without the law to define sin sharply (v. 13b), both sin (v. 13a) and death (v. 14) were present and powerful. Verse 13b is a reminder of Paul's own teaching about the negative effects of the law on the sinful condition of humanity. Since this teaching could suggest that people can be penalized for their sins only if they are 'under the law,' Paul insists that, on the contrary, death reigned even over those who did not sin by violating a specific law of God. In vv. 13-14, then, Paul is reasserting the universality of death in the face of an objection to the effect that his own emphasis on the law as bringing wrath (4:15) would imply the absence of death in the absence of torah.

A fourth element of Paul's argument is that history verifies that death is universal. The apostle points out that before God gave the Law on Mount Sinai, sin was already in the world. Because death was universal even though there was no law, it is obvious that men were still sinful. It was not because of men's *sinful acts* in breaking the Mosaic Law, which they did not yet have, but because of their *sinful nature* that all men 'from Adam until Moses' were subject to death.

'Before the law' refers to the time before the giving of the Mosaic law to Israel; 'sin was in the world' repeats v. 12a. 'And sin is not reckoned where there is no law' expresses Paul's view that sin can be charged explicitly and in detail to each person's account only when that person has consciously and knowingly disobeyed a direct command that prohibits that sin.

'But sin is not counted where there is no law.' Paul does not mean that it is not counted at all, for it is because of sin that men died during the Law's absence. Paul means that *in comparison* with what happens when the Law is present, when God's Law is absent sin does not seem to be reckoned. The Law makes sin apparent and sharply defined.

### b) *Death and Sin (5:14)*

#### (1) Adam the Transgressor (5:14a)

<sup>14</sup>*Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam...*

As we saw in 2:1, those who lived from the time of Adam until the giving of the law will not be judged by the Law of Moses, but on the basis of what they knew, apart from the law, about right and wrong. They will not be judged by what they didn't have (the law), but by what they did have (their own conscience and moral standards). So all come under condemnation, for even before the Law of Moses all were guilty. There was a historical Fall, bringing death to all

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people, even those who lived before the giving of the law. But then there was also the equally historical coming of the Redeemer.

‘Death’ refers clearly to physical death, but not to physical death alone; as in v. 12, spiritual death, condemnation, is also involved. By using the image of death ‘reigning,’ Paul emphasizes that death was both universal and inescapable. ‘Those who did not sin in the likeness of the transgression of Adam’ is a further identification of those who lived during this time period. With this description, Paul brings out the characteristic of these people that is essential to his argument: the ‘law-less’ context of their sin. They lived before God gave specific commandments to the people and they could not then, sin, as Adam did, by ‘transgressing.’

Because Adam and Eve were evicted from the Garden of Eden after they sinned, they had no more opportunity to disobey God’s single prohibition. They no longer had access to the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, nor have any of their descendants. Consequently, it has been impossible for any human being, either before or after Moses, to have ‘sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam.’

This is where it is important to make another distinction, that between original sin and actual sin. Actual sin occurs when we do something that transgresses or violates the law of God. Actual sin requires a conscious awareness of right and wrong and an actual violation of law. God does reveal His law in ways and places other than the Ten Commandments (e.g., the law of nature planted in the human heart). Nevertheless, for sin to be involved, one must have some kind of discernment, a conscious understanding, of the prohibition. Since death is the punishment for sin, and if an infant is incapable of actual sin, how is it possible for the infant to die in his crib? Again, it makes sense only in the way Paul argues here—that death reigned from Adam to Moses. Before there was any law in the world, there was still sin as a result of the imputation of Adam’s sin.

Paul’s overall point is that all of the human race remained under death and sin, whether under the Law or not, because death reigned (cp. Gen. 5). So Paul’s argument stands: the entire human race, because of its solidarity with Adam, stands under the ruin of sin and death. We all actually sinned in Adam! If we object, we should remember that if God had put each of us in Adam’s place individually, we would have done the same! But more important, our solidarity with Adam not only condemns us through one man but makes possible our salvation through one Man—and this brings us to the matter of our rescue.

### (2) Adam the Type (5:14b)

*...who was a type of the one who was to come.*

Having gone far enough astray, Paul resumes the main course of his argument in the last phrase of v. 14: ‘who is a type of the one to come.’ The word ‘type’ denotes those OT persons, institutions, or events that have a divinely intended function of prefiguring the eschatological age inaugurated by Christ—hence the word ‘typology.’ It is in this sense that Adam is a ‘type’ of Christ; the universal impact of his one act prefigures the impact of Christ’s act. ‘The one to come’ may reflect the contemporary Jewish designation of the Messiah as ‘the coming one,’ and the future tense is probably used because Paul is viewing Christ’s work from the perspective of Adam.

In the latter part of verse 14 Paul contrasted Christ – ‘the one who was to come’ – with Adam. Paul uses two current Jewish ways to make this contrast: 1) by referring to Adam as a ‘type’ of

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Christ; and 2) by employing the so-called ‘light to heavy’ idiom where he says, ‘if *a* is true by how much more is *b* true.’ Paul’s reference to Adam as a ‘type’ (*tupos*) or ‘pattern’ of the one who was to come calls for an explanation. In calling Adam a ‘type,’ Paul is regarding Adam as pre-figuring Christ, Adam’s ‘antitype.’ The New Testament ‘antitype’ fulfills the Old Testament ‘type,’ but in the case of Christ, in a deeply contrastive manner, as the two ‘light to heavy’ comparisons in vv. 15-17 make clear.

Our rescue came through a second and far greater Adam. The last phrase of verse 14 tells us that Adam was a ‘pattern’ or ‘type’ (Greek *tupos*) of Him who was to come. This is not because they were similar, but because they were dissimilar. The only similarity between them was that what they did affected countless numbers of the human race. Adam could also be called an anti-type of Christ because what is true of Adam is only true of Christ in the opposite sense. We must never commit the sacrilege of seeing the first and second Adams as perfectly parallel—one of the unforgivable sins of the cults, especially the Mormons.

### B. The Triumph of the Last Adam (Romans 5:15-21)

Paul explains the typological relationship between Adam and Christ in vv. 15-21. The similarity between the two consists in the fact that an act of each is considered to have determinative significance for those who ‘belong’ to each. This ‘structural’ similarity between Adam’s relationship to his ‘descendants’ and Christ’s to His underlies all of vv. 15-21. But vv. 15-17 reveal that this parallelism in structural relationship does not extend to the nature of the two acts and their consequences. Verses 15-18 present two basic contrasts between the work of Adam and of Christ. Paul introduces each contrast with the phrase ‘is not like’ (vv. 15a, 16a) and follows it with an elaboration (vv. 15b and 16b-17) using the phrase ‘how much more.’ The first contrast is one of *degree*; the work of Christ, being a manifestation of grace, is greater in every way than that of Adam (v. 15). The second contrast is (mainly) one of *consequence*: Adam’s act brought condemnation (v. 16b) and death (v. 17a); Christ’s brought righteousness (v. 16b) and life (v. 17b).

In contrast to the imputation of Adam’s sin is imputation in its best possible manifestation, the imputation of someone else’s righteousness to us. We must not dismiss this as a theological technicality. The very essence of the gospel is that someone else’s righteousness counts for us. If we get rid of imputation, we have no basis for any hope in standing before the judgment seat of God. Either we stand before God’s judgment with our righteousness or with someone else’s. Take away the imputation of the Savior’s righteousness, and there is no good news left to the gospel. We are on our own. Nothing we can bring to the table is enough to escape the wrath of a holy God.

The Bible teaches that justification is by faith alone, yet ultimately there is only one way anybody is ever saved in the presence of God, and that is through works. The question is not *whether* we are going to be saved through works; the question is *whose* works. We are saved through the works of the one who alone fulfilled the terms of the covenant of works. That is why it is not just the death of Christ that redeems us, but it is also the life of Christ. By one man’s disobedience we were plunged into ruin, but by the obedience of one man, the new Adam, we are justified. Saying that we are justified by faith alone is simply shorthand for saying that we are justified by Christ alone. Justification by faith alone means that we cannot make it on the basis

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of our works but by trusting in someone else's works. Our works will never save us, but Christ's works are perfect, and they meet all the requirements of the covenant of works.

### 1. The Contrast of Effectiveness (5:15)

#### a) Free Gift vs. Trespass (5:15a)

<sup>15</sup>*But the free gift is not like the trespass.*

The first contrast is clearly stated as being between 'the free gift' of Christ and 'the transgression' of Adam, acts that were totally opposite. By definition, all gifts are free, but *charisma*, ('free gift') refers to something given with special graciousness and favor, and therefore could also be appropriately rendered 'grace gift.' 'Transgression' is from *paraptōma*, which has the basic meaning of deviating from a path, or departing from the norm. By extension, it carries the idea of going where one should not go, and therefore is sometimes translated 'trespass.' The one sin of Adam that was bequeathed to all his posterity and that brought the reign of death on the world was a transgression from the one command, from the single norm for obedience that God had given.

Verse 15 begins with a 'but' because Paul is now qualifying the typological relationship between Adam and Christ he enunciates in v. 14b. He first states the difference: 'the gift is not like the trespass.' Paul uses yet a third term to describe Adam's representative act: 'trespass,' or 'false step.' He probably shifts to this term to create a phonetic parallel with the key word in the verse: *charisma*, 'gift.' 'Gift' denotes the gift given to the believer (as is usually the case in Paul), but the act of Christ Himself is considered as a 'work of grace.' Paul chooses this unusual way of designating the work of Christ to accentuate its gracious character and its power: Christ's act, being a work of God's grace (*charis*), is far more potent than Adam's act.

#### b) Death vs. Grace (5:15b)

*For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.*

In the protasis ('if...') of this sentence, Paul states the relationship between Adam's sin and the spiritual plight of all people that he hinted at in v. 12: the transgression of the 'one' brought death to 'the many.' 'The many' refers simply to a great number: how inclusive that number might be can be determined only by context. In the protasis of this verse, 'the many' clearly includes all people; for Paul has already said that 'all died' with reference to the sin of Adam (v. 12). But in the apodosis ('how much more...'), 'the many' must be qualified by Paul's insistence in v. 17 that only those who 'receive' the gift benefit from Christ's act. Here it refers to 'a great number' of people (but not all of them) or to 'all who respond to the gift of grace.' For them, Paul claims, the enjoyment of the gift and grace of God will be even more certain than the death that came to all in Adam. Condemnation through Adam is inescapable. But alongside condemnation there is the grace of God, a superabundance connected with God's gift in Christ that has the power not only to cancel the effects of Adam's work but to create, positively, life and peace.

Perhaps for the sake of parallelism, Paul uses 'many' in two different senses in this verse. As will be seen below, he uses the term *all* with similarly distinct meanings in verse 18. In regard to Adam's act, 'many' is universal and inclusive, corresponding to the 'all' in verse 12. Because *all* men, without exception, under the sentence of death (as he has made clear in earlier chapters).

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Instead of bringing man into the province of God, Adam's transgression delivered him and all his posterity to the province of Satan.

The heart of Paul's comparison, however, is that Christ's one act of salvation had immeasurably greater impact than Adam's one act of damnation. The divine provision of redemption not only is an expression of the grace of God the Father but of the grace of God the Son. But the 'gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, did more than simply provide the way for fallen mankind to be restored to the state of Adam's original innocence. Jesus Christ not only reversed the curse of death by forgiving and cleansing from sin but provided the way for redeemed men to share in the full righteousness and glory of God. John Calvin wrote that 'Christ is much more powerful to save, than Adam was to destroy.' God's grace is greater than man's sin. Not only is it greater than the one original sin of Adam that brought death to all men but it is greater than all the accumulated sins that men have ever or will ever commit.

It might be said that Adam's sinful act, devastating as it was, had but a one-dimensional effect—it brought death to everyone. But the effect of Christ's redemptive act has facets beyond measure, because He not only restores man to spiritual life but gives him the very life of God. Death by nature is static and empty, whereas life by nature is active and full. Only life can 'abound.' Contrary to its use in the beginning of this verse regarding Adam, the term 'many' now carries its normal meaning, applying only to those for whom Christ's gracious gift of salvation is made effective through their faith in Him. The practical truth of Romans 5:15 is that the power of sin, which is death, can be broken, but the power of Christ, which is salvation, *cannot* be broken (cp. 2 Tim. 1:10).

The sin of Adam brought death—a decaying, degenerative force. But grace brought a far more dynamic power—life. It not only did away with death, but restored what had been destroyed.

### 2. The Contrast in Extent (5:16)

#### a) Free Gift vs. Sin (5:16a)

<sup>16</sup>*And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin.*

Paul announces a second contrast between the act of Adam and that of Christ in v. 16a and then explains it in vv. 16b and 17. The first sentence in the verse is extremely compact in Greek, a literal translation being 'and the gift is not like the one who sinned.' Since the 'one who sinned' does not make an adequate contrast with 'the gift,' we have to assume the point of contrast from the context; and perhaps the 'condemnation' from the following sentence is the best alternative. We might then paraphrase, 'and the gift is not like the condemnation that came through the one who sinned.'

The second contrast between the one act of Adam and the one act of Christ is in regard to extent. In that regard, just as in effectiveness, Christ's justification is far greater than Adam's condemnation. In verse 15 Paul speaks of 'the transgression of the one,' whereas in verse 16 he speaks of 'the one who sinned,' that is, the one who transgressed. In the first case the emphasis is on the sin, in the second it is on the sinner. But the basic truth is the same. It was the *one sin* by the *one man* at the *one time* that brought God's judgment and its resulting condemnation.

#### b) Condemnation vs. Justification (5:16b)

*For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.*

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As he did in v. 15, Paul goes on to elaborate the contrast. Paul, in fact, has two contrasts in mind: 1) the contrast between the results of Adam's act and Christ's – condemnation (*katakrima*) versus justification (*dikaiōma*) – and 2) the number of sins taken into account – the judicial verdict associated with Adam was based on one sin; the decree of justification that came through Christ came after an untold number of sins. Not only, then, are the results of the actions of Adam and Christ diametrically opposed; but the graciousness of God's work in Christ becomes all the more evident when one considers the numbers of sins taken into consideration in each respective action.

Verse 16 tells us that Christ's work is far more powerful. Adam's one transgression brought death. Jesus' death brought forgiveness for thousands of transgressions. Clearly, Jesus work is far superior.

The gift of God's grace through Jesus Christ 'is not like that.' God's judgment on Adam and his posterity arose from but one transgression. On the other hand, however, the free gift arose not simply because of that single transgression but from many transgressions, and its result is not simply restoration but justification. This verse contains two very practical truths that are closely related. The first is that God hates sin so much that it took only one sin to condemn the entire human race and separate them from Him. It was not that Adam's first sin was worse than others he committed or worse than men have committed since. It was simply that his first sin *was sin*. The other truth in verse 16 is still more amazing and incomprehensible, and it is as heartening as the first is sobering. Greater even than God's hatred of sin is His love for the sinner.

### 3. The Contrast in Efficacy (5:17)

Rather than an explanation, or further proof of v. 16a, parallel to v. 16b, v. 17 elaborates the contrast between the 'condemnation' and the 'justification' in v. 16b. At the same time, v. 17 reiterates the argument of v. 15b, as is clear from the parallels in structure and language. In fact, v. 17 is the summary and climax of Paul's delineation of the contrasting effects of the parallel redemptive-historical acts of the two 'men.' The parallel, as Paul stresses throughout this paragraph, is that, in each case, a critical spiritual condition has been introduced into human history 'through' the act of 'one man.'

#### a) *Trespass and Death (5:17a)*

<sup>17</sup>*For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man...*

The third contrast, between the one act of Adam and the one act of Christ is in regard to efficacy, the capacity to produce a desired result. As Paul has already pointed out, Adam's one act of sin brought the reign of death. But that was hardly the *intent* of the first sin. Neither Adam nor Eve sinned because they wanted to die; they sinned because they expected to become like God. Their sin produced the very opposite result from that which they desired. Instead of becoming more like God, they became more *unlike* Him

Paul's purpose is to cheer and encourage us by showing that the same connection between the act of one man and the fate of all that obtained in the case of 'the one man' Adam also obtained in the case of another act of another 'man,' and that the act of this second 'man' brings consequences even more glorious than those of the first man were deleterious. There is on the side of Christ's act an 'abundance' that leads Paul to put the two parts of the sentence not in a relationship of simple comparison – 'as...so also' – but in a relationship of degree – 'how much more.' As in v. 15, the 'abundance' is due to, or 'consists of,' God's grace and His gift, the

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result of that grace. This gift is specified to be ‘righteous,’ here clearly the status of a new relationship with God. It is because it is *God* working freely in the act of Christ that that act possesses the power to more than reverse the effects of Adam’s human decision.

### b) *Righteousness and Life (5:17b)*

*...much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*

Verse 17 emphasizes that Christ’s work is far more efficacious. Christ gives to man far more than he lost in Adam—more indeed than Adam ever had! The blessing that comes from Christ is infinitely greater.

The one act of the one Man, Jesus Christ, however, produced the desired result. The divine intent of Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself on the cross was that ‘those who receive the abundance of’ the unmatched act of ‘grace and of the gift of righteousness’ would ‘reign in life through the One’ who died for them, namely, Jesus Christ. The one-dimensional result of Adam’s one act was death, whereas the result of Christ’s one act is life, which is multi-dimensional. Christ not only offers life but abundant life, life that abounds. The redeemed in Christ not only *receive* abundant life but are given righteousness as a gift (cp. 2 Cor. 5:21). They reign in that righteous life with their Lord and Savior. They possess the very righteous, glorious, and eternal life of God Himself. The ‘practical use’ of this great truth is that the One who has granted us spiritual life will fulfill that life in us. To reign in life through Christ is also to have power over sin.

We could think of ‘shall reign’ as a future thing. But surely the fact that Paul says this here means that there is a sense in which we can ‘reign’ with Christ even in this present life. We are now the children of God, and as such we are to reign. We have stepped out from the seed of Adam, this humanity that has revolted and is dead. By the grace of God we have become the humanity that is redeemed. We are the seed of Jesus Christ. Well then (Paul will say beginning in 6:1), let’s live this way! Paul’s explanation of sin’s origin is not just an academic exercise. It’s a call to life! It’s a call to live as the children of God—as the descendants of Jesus Christ.

There is an importance difference between the reigns of death and life. The former has the character of fate; while, as v. 12 has shown, not unrelated to our own act of sin, death is – originally – not a consciously chosen destiny. The reign of life, on the other hand, is experience through choice and personal decision; it is for those who ‘receive’ the gift. The importance of this qualification can hardly be over-emphasized. For it reminds us – lest we have forgotten Romans 1-4! – that righteousness and life are for those who *respond* to God’s grace in Christ and that they are *only* for those who respond. What appears at first sight to be a universalism on both sides of the Adam/Christ parallel is here, then, importantly qualified.

### 4. The Contrast in Essence (5:18-19)

The fourth contrast between the one act of Adam and the one act of Christ is in regard to essence. Verses 18 and 19 summarize the analogy of Adam and Christ. Paul’s primary teaching in these two verses is that the essence of Adam’s ‘one transgression’ (v. 18a) was ‘disobedience’ (v. 19a), whereas the essence of Christ’s ‘one act of righteousness’ (v. 18b) was ‘obedience’ (v. 19b). When God commanded Adam not to eat of the forbidden fruit, Adam disobeyed and brought death. When God sent His only begotten Son into the world to suffer and die, the Son obeyed and brought life.

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### a) *Condemnation vs. Justification (5:18)*

<sup>18</sup>*Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.*

Paul again asserts that Adam's trespass has been instrumental in leading to the 'condemnation' of all people. And if, as is clear, Adam's act has brought condemnation to all, without exception must we not conclude that Christ's act has brought justification and life for all? A growing number of scholars argue that this is exactly what Paul intends to say here. Others argue that what is universal in v. 18b is not the actual justification accomplished in the lives of individuals, but the *basis* for this justification in the work of Christ. Christ has won for all 'the sentence of justification' and this is now offered freely to all who will 'receive the gift.' Nevertheless, whatever one's view on 'limited atonement' might be (and the view just outlined is obviously incompatible with this doctrine), it is questionable whether Paul's language can be taken in this way. For one thing, Paul always uses 'justification' language of the status actually conferred on the individual, never of the atonement won on the cross itself. Second, it is doubtful whether Paul is describing simply an 'offer' made to people through the work of Christ; certainly in the parallel in the first part of the verse, the condemnation actually embraces all people. But perhaps the biggest objection to this view is that it misses the point for which Paul is arguing in this passage. This point is that there can be an assurance of justification and life, on one side, that is just as strong and certain as the assurance of condemnation on the other. Paul wants to show, not how Christ has made *available* righteousness and life for all, but how Christ has secured the benefits of that righteousness for all who belong to Him.

As with *the many* in verse 15, Paul apparently uses 'all' in verse 18 for the sake of parallelism, although the two occurrences of the term carry different meanings. Just as 'the many died' in verse 15 refers inclusively to all men, so 'life to all men' here refers exclusively to those who trust in Christ. This verse does not teach universalism, as some have contended through the centuries. It is abundantly clear from other parts of this epistle, including the first two verses of this chapter, that salvation comes only to those who have faith in Jesus Christ (see also 1:16-17; 3:22, 28; 4:5, 13).

Throughout the passage, Paul's concern to maintain parallelism between Adam and Christ has led him to choose terms that will clearly express this. In vv. 15 and 19, he uses 'the many;' here he uses 'all people.' But in each case, Paul's point is not so much that the groups affected by Christ and Adam, respectively, are coextensive, but that Christ affects those who are His just as certainly as Adam does those who are his. When we ask who belongs to, or is 'in,' Adam and Christ, respectively, Paul makes his answer clear: every person, without except, is 'in Adam' (cp. vv. 12d-14); but only those who 'receive the gift' (v. 17; 'those who believe,' according to 1:16-5:11) are 'in Christ.' That 'all' does not always mean 'every single human being' is clear from many passages, it often being clearly limited in context (cp. e.g., Rom. 8:32; 12:17, 18; 14:2; 16:19), so this suggestion has no linguistic barrier.

### b) *Sinners vs. Righteous (5:19)*

<sup>19</sup>*For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*

In case we have missed his main point, Paul reiterates it in this verse, using the same basis structure as in v. 18 but different language. In contrast to the 'all people' of v. 18, Paul denotes those who are affected by the acts of Adam and Christ by 'the many' (as in v. 15). Two other

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differences are more important, suggesting that v. 19 is not just the repetition of v. 18, but its elaboration. First, Paul calls Adam's destiny-determining action an 'act of disobedience' rather than simply a 'sin' (v. 12) or 'trespass' (vv. 15, 17, 18). In keeping with the careful contrasts that Paul has used throughout the passage, then, Christ's work is characterized as 'an act of obedience.' Paul may be thinking of the 'active obedience' of Christ, His lifelong commitment to 'do His Father's will' and so fulfill the demands of the law. But Paul's focus seems rather to be on Jesus' death as the ultimate act of obedience. This is suggested by the parallel with Adam's (one) act of disobedience, Phil. 2:8 – Jesus 'became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross' – and the consistent connection Paul makes between justification and Jesus' death.

Second, as Paul chooses different language to characterize the era-initiating acts of Adam and Christ, so he also uses different language to describe the results of their respective acts. Rather than states, or destinies (death/life, condemnation/justification), Paul now describes these results in more 'personal' categories: through Adam the many 'were made sinners'; through Christ they 'will be made righteous [people].' In both parts of the verse, then, we are dealing with a real, though 'forensic,' situation: people actually become sinners in solidarity with Adam – by God's decision; people actually become 'righteous' in solidarity with Christ – again, by God's decision. But there is one important difference: while we *deserve* condemnation – for 'all have sinned' – we are *freely given* righteousness and life. It is this gratuitous element on the side of Christ's work that enables Paul to celebrate the 'how much more' of our 'reigning' in life (v. 17) and that gives to every believer absolute assurance for the life to come.

'Made' translates *kathislēmi* and here carries the idea of constituting, or establishing. The guilt of Adam's 'disobedience' was imputed to all his descendants. They were thus 'made sinners'—in the sense that they became legally guilty in God's sight. In the same way, but with the exact opposite effect, Christ's 'obedience' causes those who believe in Him to be 'made righteous' in God's sight. The consequence of His perfect 'obedience'—an unblemished, impeccable righteousness—is imputed to their account, making them legally righteous.

'Made' righteous is better understood as 'declared' righteous. Salvation is the declarative act of God. We have sinned and have been declared to be guilty. When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we are justified and declared to be free of guilt. 'For as by one man's obedience many were declared sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be declared righteous.'

### 5. The Contrast in Energy (5:20-21)

The fifth and last contrast between the one act of Adam and the one act of Christ is in regard to energy.

Paul now returns to address the concerns of the Jewish objectors who reject Paul's Law-free gospel and who seek to reinstate the keeping of Law for justification both for Jews and Gentiles. True, the Law was given at a point in history. Law, however, did not solve the problem of universal Sin introduced by Adam. Law provided the means of defining and identifying Sin, but did nothing to reverse its accompaniment, Death (vv. 13-14). Now, adds Paul, Law entered for two God-given reasons.

#### a) Law vs. Grace (5:20)

<sup>20</sup>*Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more...*

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The energizing force behind man's sin is 'the Law,' which 'came in that the transgression might increase.' God gave the Law through Moses as a pattern for righteousness but not as a means of righteousness. The law has no power to produce righteousness. The law identifies particular transgressions, so that those acts can more easily be seen as sinful and thereby cause men to see themselves more easily as sinners. For that reason, the Law also has power to incite men to unrighteousness, not because the Law is evil but because men are evil.

The division of humankind into two groups, determined by solidarity with the two divinely appointed representative-corporate figures of Adam and Christ, is simple and straightforward. But, it may be objected, is not this scheme overly simple? How about the law of Moses, which occupies so central a place in the life of God's people, Israel? Such questions would naturally occur to the reader of the OT, but they must have been particularly urgent in light of the discord between Jew and Gentile in the church at Rome and elsewhere in the early church. Many Jews accorded to the law of Moses great theological, even, at times, salvific, importance. It is, then, no wonder that Paul feels it necessary to interject a comment about the role of the Mosaic law in salvation history.

The law came with a purpose. But its purpose, Paul affirms, was not to change the situation created by Adam, but to make it worse. The law 'has increased' the trespass – not erased, or eased, or neutralized it, as many Jews, and perhaps some Jewish Christians, may have argued. But in what sense has the law 'increased the trespass'? We understand Paul to be asserting that God's purpose (or one of His purposes) in giving the law of Moses to Israel was to 'intensify' the seriousness of sin. The word 'trespass' alludes to the sin of Adam (cp. vv. 15, 17, 18), but considered in its corporate dimension as 'power.' The fact and power of 'sin' introduced into the world by Adam has not been decreased by the law, but given a new dimension as rebellion against the revealed, detailed will of God; sin has become 'transgression.'

The first purpose was for the Law 'to increase' or multiply the trespass. Significantly, 'trespass' and 'sin' are synonyms and both are singular. Thus, Law did not stir up a greater number of individual breaches of the commandments so much as intensify and reinforce the underlying attitude of rebellion to the kindly will of the Creator. But this intensification of Sin, he said, was to reveal the infinitely greater outpouring of God's grace in the face of such wickedness. 'Thus,' he continues, 'where Sin increased, grace more abundantly overflowed.' The verb *perisseuein* means to overflow. Paul, however, has intensified this by attaching the preposition *hyper* to the verb; *hyper-perisseuein* means 'superabundant outpouring.' In other words, God did not merely meet Law-inspired Sin with grace equal to that Sin. Rather, His grace was immeasurably greater than that Sin, such is His love for sinners.

Why would God want sin to abound? We would think He would want it to abate, to see it ebb and disappear from His creation. The law comes and reveals to us our helpless condition; the law reveals the reality of sin. We must remember the principle that the Scriptures set forth: where there is no law, there is no sin. By definition, sin is a transgression of the law of God, yet we have this inherited corruption from our father Adam, and God gives law that we may see the extent of our sin. There is also a true sense in which the added laws incite us to sin. So desperately wicked are we in our hearts that every time God adds a new law we take it as an occasion to further our rebellion and disobedience. We see that happen with our children. The more rules we give them, the more determined they are to break them.

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The people who lived between Adam and the Law of Moses didn't have the Law of Moses, but they were sinners nonetheless because they had the law of their own moral standards and they had violated that standard (2:1; 5:14). Then, *in addition* to this moral standard that all humanity has had from the beginning, God gave the law through Moses, and this made it possible 'that the offense might abound.' In other words, the law made it abundantly plain that they were sinners.

The Law was never given to make us do right. Paul will make this clear later in chapter 7, as he also does in Galatians 3:19-24. Where there is Law, we sin more, both in terms of quantity and of depth. But in doing this the Law also moves us closer to grace because the farther we descend, the nearer we are to brokenness and thus to Christ. This is why Paul says victoriously, 'But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.' The word translated 'abounded all the more' is scarcely translatable in few words. 'Super-increased' is a possibility, or 'super-abounded.' It pictures unending, overflowing grace—a grace that knows no bounds. Grace is always more abundant than sin. Spurgeon has a sermon on this text entitled 'Grace Abounding over Abounding Sin.' No matter how great your sin—in quantity or depth, God's grace super-abounds to you! No one is beyond the grace of Christ.

'But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.' This is not just a comparison. It is not like an equation with sin and grace on either side of it. It is not a comparative; it is a superlative. There really is no comparison. Where sin abounds, Paul says, grace does much more abound. The scales are not equal. Sin is far outweighed by the grace that God gives. We live in the presence of a super-abundance of grace that is far greater than the depths of our disobedience.

But this negative purpose in the law is not, of course, God's final word. The law remains God's law, a gift given to Israel with an *ultimately* positive salvation-historical role. In showing sin to be 'utterly sinful' (7:13), the law reveals the desperate situation of people apart from grace. But, as Paul has emphasized throughout this paragraph, God's grace is more than sufficient to overcome the increase in the power and seriousness of sin brought by the law. For in that very place where sin 'increased,' grace 'super-increased.' The law's negative purpose in radicalizing the power of sin has been more than fully met by the provisions of God's grace. However deep in the power of sin Israel may have sunk, God's grace was deeper yet. In Christ, of course, we find the fulfillment of the promise of God's 'super-abounding' grace.

### b) *Death vs. Life (5:21)*

...<sup>21</sup>so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This verse gives the purpose of the super-abounding of grace in v. 20b and also brings Paul's comparison and contrast between Adam and Christ to its climax. Paul relates sin and death different than he had done earlier; now he says, sin reigned 'in death.' Death has its own dominion: humanity as determined, and dominated, by Adam. And in this dominion, sin is in control. But those who 'receive the gift' (v. 17) enjoy a transfer from this domain to another, the domain of righteousness, in which grace reigns and where life is the eventual outcome. Again, we see how Paul can highlight the importance of grace by giving it an active role, and how he pictures righteousness, as the 'gateway' to eternal life. And all of this, Paul reminds us in conclusion, is 'through Jesus Christ our Lord' – ending this marvelous section on the same Christological theme as the preceding one (5:11).

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Paul is not talking about the mere presence of sin; he is talking about its reign, about sin exerting its power and authority. The reign of sin may be found in the face of death, because in death we see the exultation of sin, the empowering of it, into this world.

Finally, what is the purpose of this grace? Verse 21 says, ‘so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ This includes our reigning in life (cp. v. 17). Practically, how does this happen for those of us who are believers but are not reigning? We need, first, to review *the greatness of our ruin*. This is where we must always begin. Before we can reign we must be brought low. Our solidarity with Adam and the rest of humanity in sin must be reiterated. All our existence is colored by sin. And our ruin in Adam is so great, there is no human remedy. Having reviewed our ruin, we need next to review *the greatness of our rescue*. We must set before our consciousness the incomparable work of the matchless Second Adam. It is so supreme that it not only remedies Adam’s own transgression, but all the sins ever committed by all the people who ever lived. The profound contemplation of our ruin and our rescue can restore us so that we will *reign* properly. At the risk of making this too simple, this can all be summed up in one word—LOVE. Our healing and subsequent reign in life come as we contemplate and receive God’s love. Knowing God loves us, allowing His affection to permeate every corner of our lives, we will reign in life to His glory.

As he concludes his explanation of sin’s entrance into the world through Adam, Paul’s emphasis is not on death but on life. It is actually an emphasis that flows from verse 10, ‘shall be saved by His life,’ through verse 17, ‘shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ,’ to here in verse 21: God’s ‘grace [shall] reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.’ Rather than simply explaining that all humanity died in Adam, Paul emphasizes the other side. All humans either have been or still are dead in Adam, but those who have accepted Christ as their Savior are not still dead but are alive. And if we are alive, if we are the redeemed humanity, and at such a cost, how important it is that we show this in our everyday lives. That will be Paul’s theme in chapter 6.

For next time: Read Romans 6:1-14.