

## GRACE IS GREATER THAN SIN

Romans 5:12-21

Key Verse: 5:17

*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!*

In the first part of Romans 5, we learned that we can live a wonderful new life filled with peace, grace, and love of God when we are justified by faith in Christ Jesus. We also learned that God does not promise a trouble-free life for his children. In fact, we tend to suffer more in this unbelieving world when we become true believers. But Christian suffering is not meaningless. It produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope. And this hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (5). And how amazing is the love of God? He demonstrated his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (8).

Many Bible scholars consider the second part of Romans 5 one of the most difficult passages of St. Paul's epistles. One goes further saying perhaps St. Peter had this passage in mind when he said that some things in Paul's letters are hard to understand (2Pe 3:16). Indeed, this is a difficult passage to study. However, the main point of St. Paul is straightforward. It is the details behind the main message that are hard to understand. So, let me summarize the main point of St. Paul before we look into the details.

The power of sin is great. This terrible disease called sin infected people in much worse way than the Ebola virus ever could. When the first man Adam sinned, the sin virus altered the basic DNA of the entire mankind. Sin made all mankind sick so that all of us are under the power of death, both physically and spiritually. We were separated from God. We cannot overcome the power of sin on our own, no matter how hard we try. But St. Paul declares that God's grace is greater than all our sin. When we are in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, our victory over sin and death is guaranteed. Paul declares in verse 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!* This is how NLT paraphrases this verse: "For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ."

### I. DEATH IN ADAM (12-14)

Look at verse 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*— The word, "Therefore," indicates that Paul continues to tell us about the fruits of justification by faith in Jesus. He teaches us once again that all of us are sinners, and only by the grace of God through his Son Jesus we can enjoy peace, grace and hope in him. Today's passage

is a transition from justification by faith (described in Romans 1-5) to sanctification that is discussed in Romans 6-8. Paul declares in verse 12 that “When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned” (NLT). We are Adam’s descendants. His sin-stained blood is in us. Sin is in our DNA. Each of us is a sinner by birth. This means that even if you are abandoned in a remote island as an infant, you will grow up a sinner. Not only that, each of us is a sinner because we sinned. We are sinners by choice. Finally, we are sinners by practice. When we choose to commit a sin for the first time, we feel a pang of guilt and remorse. But the next time, it feels easier to commit the same sin. So everyone is a sinner. There is no exception (Ro 3:10). And the result is that death came to all people, because all sinned. Everyone is under the power of death. Just as sin spread through one man, death came to all people. In fact, death proves that everyone sinned indeed.

Paul continues in verses 13-14. *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. 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.* Sin entered the world through Adam’s disobedience. But there was no law during the period between Adam and Moses. There were no written code of the law, no Ten Commandments. So sin was not charged against anyone’s account, even though sin was still there. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses. Everyone died physically during the time period. More importantly, everyone died spiritually, that is, everyone was cut off from God, the Creator and the source of life. Again, this death, that is separation from God, proves that all people are sinners and are subject to the righteous judgment of God.

Sin entered through one man, Adam. One person’s sin brought death and condemnation to all mankind. In our modern society, people often speak and behave anyway they want, based on their selfish and self-centered feelings, with no regard to the possible impact of their behavior on others. But we should not minimize the influence of one person. What we do and what we say affect other people. If a father sins, the entire family members, especially, children suffer. A person’s sin not only affects his life, but also that of his family, friends and the community he lives in. Similarly, a small act of obedience by one person can change the course of history. The Samaritan woman in John 4 was the butt of a joke for her village people when she lived a life of following her sinful desires. She was not a good influence on the men of her life, neither the five ex-husbands nor the boyfriend. But she became a source of blessing to many people when she met Jesus personally and lived a life of mission. Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because of her testimony, “He told me everything I ever did” (Jn 4:39). Her faith in Jesus brought eternal life to many people.

Above all, there was an act of obedience by one man that changed the course of human history forever. It’s the act of obedience by our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus sacrificed his life on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. His obedience changed the history from BC to AD. Let us think about the impact of his beautiful act of obedience on our lives.

## II. THE GIFT OF LIFE IN CHRIST (15-19)

Look at verse 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!* St. Paul compares and contrasts Adam and Jesus Christ. There is a certain parallel between Adam and Christ. Paul called Adam, "a pattern of the one to come," that is, Jesus (14). When Adam disobeyed God's words, sin entered the world, and all people died because of the one man. But when Jesus obeyed God's will, the free gift of justification was given to mankind. All those who believe in him have eternal life, just because of the one man, Jesus Christ.

However, the impact of Adam's disobedience and that of Christ are not symmetrical. Jesus is different from Adam. Paul says that the gift is not like the trespass. What does this mean? The NLT version translates verse 15 this way: "But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ." Paul repeats this truth in verse 16: "And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins" (NLT). Pastor John Piper explains: "The deepest reason why death reigns over all is not because of our individual sins, but because of Adam's sin imputed to us. So the deepest reason eternal life reigns is not because of our individual deeds of righteousness, but because of Christ's righteousness imputed to us by grace through faith." Yes, Adam's act of disobedience changed the human history. Because of his sin, all people died, separated from the Creator God. But God's grace that came through Christ's obedience is greater than sin, because it overflows to many so that all those who believe in him are declared not guilty, no matter what kind of sins they committed in the past.

Let us read verse 17 together. *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!* Notice that the phrase, "how much more" is repeated twice in this passage (15,17). God's grace through Jesus is greater than all our sin! In addition, St. Paul uses words such as "overflow" (15) and "abundant provision" (17) to describe the grace of God. In economics, we say that most goods and services are "rival" in consumption. It means that if I take a seat at a crowded football game, there would be one fewer seat available for other people. In this world, there is a limited supply of good things for us. But Paul says that the grace of God overflows. God's provision of his grace is abundant, meaning it will never run out for anyone who comes to Jesus by faith. The gift of righteousness reigns in life through Jesus Christ!

Paul sums up in verses 18-19 how sin and death ruled mankind by the trespass of one man but in Christ we are made right with God and we will reign with Christ in eternal life. *Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. 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.*

### III. GRACE REIGNS TO BRING ETERNAL LIFE (20-21)

Look at verses 20-21. *The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* How did the law increase the trespass? There were no speed limit violators until the state police put up speed limit signs on highways. As we learned earlier, there is an important function of the law. The law tells us what is right and what is wrong. The speed limit sign of 65 mph tells us that it is dangerous to drive faster than the limit. The law convicts us of our sin. It helps us to know that we are under the righteous judgment of God. The limitation of the law is that it cannot solve our sin problem. It can only expose our sin problem.

Many people today take the sin problem lightly. They consider life without God more enjoyable, not realizing that sin brings death to them. Young people like the ideas of enjoying pleasures here and now. *Carpe diem* (seize the day) or YOLO (you only live once) is their motto in life. Life is short; enjoy the most of it while you can, they would say. Yes, life is short in this world, but the Bible teaches us that after living a short life in this world, everyone will live in eternity, either in heaven or in hell. Therefore we must think about the sin problem seriously.

Paul says that the law increases sin and sin reigns in death. But there is good news. Where sin increased, grace increased all the more so that grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (21). Sin made all men sick to death. We cannot resist this power of sin with a strong human will. But there is something that is stronger than the power of sin. It is the grace of Jesus. When we are in the grace of Christ we have victory over sin and death. This victory is guaranteed. By this grace, we can claim the spiritual fruits of peace, grace, hope and the love of God. We are given two distinctive choices with two distinctive consequences. If we choose to remain in Adam, we remain in sin and death. If we choose to believe in Jesus, we have the assurance of our salvation and eternal life in the kingdom of God. Which one would you rather choose for yourself?

In conclusion, let us remember two points from today's passage. First, one person is important in God. Each of us is important. When one person lives in sin, he has a bad influence on all people around him, like a person with Ebola spreading the contagious disease to many. On the other hand, one person who obeys the word of God can have a good influence on his family, friends and community. May God help us to be a source of blessing to many by living a life of faith before God! Second, God's grace is greater than all our sins. The grace of God through Jesus Christ overflows. No matter how great sins you committed, God's grace is greater than all of them. Jesus already paid the price of all our sins with his life. All we have to do is to claim the abundant grace by coming to Jesus by faith!