
“Christ, Our Righteous Head”

ROMANS 5:12-17

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AT A GLANCE

There are only two types of people in the world: those in Adam and those in Christ. Each of these men was designated to be a representative for many. In Adam we have sin and death. In Christ, we have life and righteousness. Choose Jesus!

INTRODUCTION

Commentaries may not agree on much with this passage, but they do agree it's the most important and the most difficult in Romans and possibly the entire New Testament. It explains the fall of man, the universality of sin and death, and the reversal of that effect by the obedience of Jesus Christ and the free gift of God's grace.

Adam was not a metaphorical figure but a historic one. But he was more than just a historic figure. He was also the federal head, the representative of all of humanity. In Adam's one sin, all humanity was ensnared in sin and death.

That's the bad news of the Gospel. That's the hard truth. Even if you and I never broke a single written command, we'd still be in sin and alienated from God. We call this imputation. The sin nature was imputed to all man because in Adam, all sinned. You might know this as the doctrine of original sin.

Lest you reject the doctrine of imputation of Adam's sin too swiftly, I want to remind you of another imputation from one man to the many He represents – that of imputed righteousness of Jesus to all who believe. That's the good news of the Gospel. In Adam you have death. In Christ, you have life.

A brief word about the flow of this passage. Paul begins Romans 5:12 by introducing the theme of the next 10 verses. Then he takes a bit of a detour in verses 13 and 14 to explain how death and sin were in the world even before the Law. Then he picks back up in verses 15-17 to contrast how Adam and Jesus are so much different before coming back to his original thought from verse 12 in verse 18. We'll pick up in verse 18 next week.

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— ¹³for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵But the free gift is not like the trespass. 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. ¹⁶And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned

through that one man, 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.

PRAY

Verse 12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned

Paul begins a sentence that he did not complete. Look down at verse 18 and you'll see he reintroduced the thought again with another **therefore**, saying, "as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men."

Death was not original to creation. Death is the punishment for sin and sin entered the human experience through the first man, Adam. Thus, death and sin entered through Adam, but neither are limited to Adam. It **spread to all man because all sinned**.

Daniel Doriani argues, "Humans choose sin because they are sinful from birth. They have Adam's sinful nature." He points to the moral corruption which shows up early in the tantrums and speech patterns of young children. David said, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Psalm 51:5

In God's design, He made Adam to be the father of humanity – that's actually what his name means – mankind. And God created mankind to pass on to our offspring our same essence.

We pass on to our offspring our chromosomes, the very building blocks of our substance. That's the natural law God established in Creation, before the fall. The father passes on to the offspring. When Adam sinned, his nature was corrupted and he passed on the corrupted nature, spiritual death, to each of his offspring.

We call this federal headship, federal meaning representative. R.C. Sproul notes that this is the classic reformed theology. He says, "Adam was the federal head of the whole human race...What Adam did in the garden was not simply for himself but for all those whom he represented."

Jonathan Edwards argued that if the Bible never taught a universal fall of the human race into sin from the very beginning, and if the Bible gave no account of the fall, reason would require that we posit such an event. What else would explain the universality of sin in the human race?

We see universally corrupt societies because the sin nature is imputed from Adam to all of mankind, without exception.

When Paul says **all sinned** the verb he used for **sinned** is in the aorist tense. This signifies action in the past, as opposed to "all sin" as if stating a principle. Kent Hughes explains, "The idea is all of us sinned in that simple completed act, without exception. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Romans 3:23

With that in mind, let's move to Paul's detour in **verses 13-14**.

– for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

What does it mean that **sin is not counted where there is no law**? This is another reason this passage is so confusing! Even before the Law was given under Moses, about 2500 years later, sin was in the world.

Consider the nature of man prior to Moses – Pharaoh's heart to kill all the Jew's infant boys, Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery, the sexual perversion of Sodom and Gomorrah, the pride of the people at the Tower of Babel, the debauchery in the days of Noah, and Cain who killed Abel. There was no shortage of wickedness and evil before the Law was given. But was that not

counted? Well, the Noahic flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues on Egypt suggest it is.

Paul explains here that while the sins of those who lived during that 2500 year period before the Law was given never heard the Law, never understood the standards of holiness, nevertheless they were still culpable. For, as Paul says, **death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam.**

Adam sinned by deliberately breaking the commandment of God – do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. But just because people who lived between Adam and Moses didn't have the law does not mean they were exempt from judgment. Paul made that clear in *Romans 2:12*, *“For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.”*

Paul's point is that even if there was not a violation of a direct commandment, all mankind is under the curse of sin and death. The purpose of the Law was not to introduce the principle of judgment and sin and death nor to create conditions in which anyone could earn righteousness by their own obedience. Instead, the Law came along to reveal just how sinful we really are!

Kent Hughes tells the story of Chuck Swindoll as a boy. Chuck had a paper delivery route as many boys of his generation did. Along the route there was a corner lot and like most of us, Chuck looked for ways to make his life easier.

Cutting across the corner of the lot saved him a little time, so he did. He did it so frequently that he wore a path through the yard. We don't have to be told this is wrong to know it is.

But one day the owner of the yard posted a sign which read, “Stay off the grass. No bikes!” Did the sign make it wrong? No. But when Chuck saw the sign and rode through the yard anyway, it intensified the transgression.

He was always guilty of the trespass, but now he was guilty of deliberately violating the rule. That day he says he rode right into the owner who was standing just around the corner waiting on him and he got a pretty stern talking to.

Obviously, Paul is not saying people didn't pay the penalty of sin before the Law...**death reigned from Adam to Moses.** Death reigned over people who sinned even if they didn't sin just like Adam did. *“For the wages of sin is death...” Romans 6:23*

But Adam rejected God's direct and clear commandment. Everyone between Adam and Moses still sinned, even if their sinning was not like Adam's; even if they did not know exactly what commandment they broke.

The point is this, no one has an excuse. Even those who have never heard of the Law, death reigns because of their identity as Adam's offspring.

Now watch what Paul does here. He's now going to introduce a counterpart to Adam, a new Adam, and with Him the counterpart to sin and death in the second part of **verse 14.**

Adam was a **type of the one who was to come** – Paul is going to compare the **one man** Adam to the **one man** Jesus Christ. The one man did something that effected the many. So, too, did the other man, Jesus, do something that effected the many. Adam was a **type** or a counterpart to Christ in that each serves as a head of those they represent.

You hear it all the time, there are two types of people in the world. Well, in this case, that's literally true. There are only two types of people in the world. One belongs either to Adam or to Christ. The former brought sin. The latter brought obedience. The former brought God's judgment, the latter His grace. The former brought death, the latter resurrection life!

We are left with Adam, our head that led to our death in sin, and Christ, our righteous head.

Verse 15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. 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.

No one enters the world spiritually neutral. We enter the world dead in sin. Remember Psalm 51:5. But something happens in Christ; a reversal happens. Christ is a much more powerful Savior than Adam was a destroyer. The life Jesus brings is much more than the death Adam brought to the world. Life in Christ overcomes and surpasses death in Adam. And this is 100% a free gift of God's grace.

The one man Adam introduced sin and death, but the grace of God is given to us in abundance through the **one man Jesus Christ**.

Verse 16 And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

Doriani says that God could have given the final word, "condemned on the basis of many trespasses." Instead, what we get is "justified through the free gift of Jesus' righteousness."

From condemned in judgment to justified in Christ. From death as our wage to **free gift** of grace. I think Paul really wants us to grapple with this grace. One man's sin brought the wage of death, or in Paul's words here **condemnation** to all men. **Following many sins** – too numerous to even comprehend – there is the **free gift** of **justification**.

It makes sense that the sin of one man, the father of mankind, would cast the rest into condemnation. That we can wrap our heads around. What doesn't make sense is that after every man has sinned, God would give the righteousness that only one man was able to secure to anyone who asks for it. That, in the words of CEB Cranfield, "is the miracle of miracles, utterly beyond human comprehension."

¹⁷For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, 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.

Adam was created to have dominion over the earth but because of sin, death reigned over Adam instead and over all of his offspring. But in Christ, what is restored is the life lost in the Garden and the reign in His glory over sin because we receive the abundant gift of God's grace and His **righteousness**.

How about a little lesson in Latin today? The early church father, Augustine, argued that Adam and Eve were made with the ability to sin - posse peccare, and the ability not to sin - posse non peccare. They also had posse mori - the ability to die, and posse non mori - the ability not to die.

After the fall, Adam and the rest of mankind lost posse non peccare - the ability not to sin, and posse non mori – the ability not to die. Just as man cannot live without dying, neither can fallen man live without sinning.

Thankfully, in heaven, after we are fully glorified, we will have non posse peccare and non posse mori! We will not be able to sin and we will not be able to die. Glory to God!

Watch this, in Christ the posse non peccare Adam lost in the Fall has been restored to us. We have dominion over sin because Christ gives us life. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that when we're tempted God always provides a way of escape. *"...God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."* 1 Corinthians 10:13

He also said in Galatians 5, “*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*”
Galatians 5:16

Peter reminds us of our call to holy living. “*As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’*” *1 Peter 1:14-16*

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