

Liberated | Week 2

Romans 5:12–21

It's not hard to find reasons for fear and worry in this world. A quick scroll through today's headlines makes it abundantly clear that human sin is doing what it's always done — wreaking havoc. Humanity was designed to love and commune with God, cultivate and care for creation, and create flourishing communities where peace and goodness reign. Instead, politicians bicker and blame, people needlessly die of starvation, criminals can get away with murder, species of animals are being driven to extinction, and there are always nations on the brink of war.

The good news is that it will not always be this way.

At the beginning of his letter, Paul tells the Christians in Rome that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God and then leads them on an exploration to see how their good, faithful and just God is making all things right. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are the means by which a thoroughly broken and condemned humanity can return to its Creator, not just for repair, but for new life. Romans 5:12–21 takes us up to 10,000 feet so we can see how God's righteousness will prevail and his grace will reign.

Day 1

The section of Romans we're looking at this week is fairly dense, but if we keep Paul's larger themes in mind, we can understand the apostle's main points without getting bogged down.

In Romans 5:1–11, Paul has just reminded us that in Christ we have been made right with God. We can experience his presence, remain secure in his love, and endure suffering in hope. Yet, we must still contend with two powers that are active in this world — sin and death. From the second half of Romans 5, all the way through chapter 8 Paul will explain how they have been defeated, and what that means for humanity. Here, starting in verse 12, he moves to a sweeping description of the gospel's implications by taking us all the way back to humanity's creation. Paul is preparing the way for what he wants to communicate in the coming chapters.

Recall that we left off in Romans 5:10–11 with a beautiful description of the reconciliation we experience in Christ. Because of this sacrificial act of reconciliation, the disaster of sin and death that began with Adam will be reversed, starting now.¹

¹ Frank Theilman, 277.

As you read, make note of how Paul compares Jesus Christ and Adam, and the effects that each has on our human situation.

Read the Word

Romans 5:12–21 (NIV)

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

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

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

¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

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

- Make a list. What came to the world through Adam? What comes to the world through Christ?

Reflect

In Romans 1–3, Paul paints us a portrait of humanity's sin and rebellion. Now he's tracing the lines of sin and death all the way back to the first human being, Adam. The first human walked with God in the new creation yet chose to wander from him in rebellion. God could have let all his descendants continue down that path. Praise God that he did not!

Our Creator intervened in the most personal way possible. Within the Trinity a decision was made to send the eternal Son to become one of us, die for our sins, and then precede us in the resurrection he guarantees to all who believe. Our heavenly Father has provided a way for us to return to him and find new life. We'll continue to celebrate that this week.

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

I am continually amazed at all Jesus' life, death, and resurrection has done. You have lavished us with an incomparable gift of life and renewal. Teach us what it means to walk in the grace and righteousness that Jesus gives us by the Spirit.

Day 2

Have you ever walked into a room only to forget what sent you there? You look around and think, "Now, why did I come in here?" Sometimes we call this kind of behavior absent-mindedness, but I think it's probably over-mindedness. We have so much going on in our brains that sometime between deciding to go into the room and actually getting there, we interrupt ourselves with a new thought.

The small section of verses we are focusing on today have an interruption in their flow. I imagine that Paul's mind was so filled with what he wanted to say to the church in Rome and so much that he wanted to clarify, that he interrupts himself. Our translators have noted this interruption with a dash.

As you read through these verses again, think about why Paul's mind might have shifted to a new thought after verse 12. It's as if he realizes someone in his audience is going to have a question, and so he decides to answer it before he goes any further.

Read the Word

Romans 5:12–14 (NIV)

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

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

¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

- Based on everything we read in Romans 2–4, do you think verse 13 answers a question that Jewish believers are asking or Gentile believers? What do you think that question might be?
- What is the “gift” that Paul mentions in Romans 5:15? What is the trespass?

Reflect on the Word

Paul begins his argument in verse 12, briefly puts it aside to make a couple of side points, then concludes this initial thought in verse 18.

He starts by tracing the origin of sin and death to Adam. He doesn’t explain how sin spread from Adam to the rest of the human race, though scholars have posed many theories over the millennia. His focus is not on mechanism, but on universality: *all* have sinned.² Death is a consequence of that sin.

We might anticipate that Paul would end verse 12 with something like, “so life has entered through one man,” but he interrupts this thought to make two points. First of all, there is the question of sin, death and the law. Sin and death have reigned over humanity since the first man. N.T. Wright offers a really helpful summary of verses 13 and 14: “A long time passed between Adam and Moses. Adam was given a direct command, and broke it; God gave Israel a set of direct commands through Moses, and they broke them. But in between the two, in this broad-brush account of early history, human beings went on sinning, and dying, even though there was no law to keep track of what they did.”³

As we’ve already seen in Romans, the place and role of the law of Moses has been a point of contention in the early church, and Paul wants to bring clarity. He will give us a fuller explanation in chapter 7, but for now, he starts with a clear premise. As Sarah Lancaster summarizes, “The absence of specific laws did not mean the absence of sin...our problem lies much deeper than in particular behaviors.” As we saw in Romans 1, our failure to acknowledge and worship God as our Creator, Sustainer, and Lord has made us incapable of truly living as God’s image-bearers. This is true of everyone, Jew and Gentile.

The second point Paul wants to make before finishing his initial thought is that “the gift is not like the trespass.” They in no way balance each other — one overwhelms the other. Verse 14 presents Adam as a “type” of the one to come, Jesus Christ. Jesus is not simply a copy of Adam sent to reverse the consequences of Adam’s sin and put everything back the way it was. The effects of what Jesus accomplished are far greater than those humanity suffered in Adam. Death and life are not simple opposites. Extinguishing life is horrifyingly easy to do, but only God can create and sustain. Jesus answers death with resurrection.

Paul insists that God has given us an incomparable gift out of his abundant grace and with it the promise of something far better. Just as we somehow share in the problem that began with

² Sarah Heaner Lancaster, *Romans*, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 99

³ Tom Wright, [*Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 1: Chapters 1-8*](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 91.

Adam, we have the hope of sharing in the life of Jesus. We'll explore this idea a bit more tomorrow, but for now, rejoice in the grace of God and the generous gift that overflows into all those who trust in Jesus!

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, you have generously given me the gift of new life in Jesus. I praise you for your grace. Thank you that all my sins have been wiped away and that death no longer reigns over me. Forgive me for taking this new life for granted. Spirit, show me how to live in love and worshipful obedience.

Day 3

Recently a popular, long running television show ended with a finale that had social media buzzing. Even those of us who never watched an episode knew that the finale left a lot of its fans disappointed. One criticism is that the writers set key characters on one trajectory for several seasons, but then suddenly sent them off in another direction in the final episodes. People complained that at the end of the series, some of the main characters behaved in ways that were inconsistent with who they were and where they seemed to be going.

In the drama of Scripture, there is a grand narrative that begins in Genesis 1 and ends with Revelation 22. The good news is that the ending is exactly what you'd expect from the One who set the story into motion. God's goodness and grace is unwavering as he works through history to bring his plan of redemption to its fulfillment in Christ. In Romans 5, Paul helps us understand that the trajectory set by Adam was altered by Jesus in a way wholly consistent with who God is.

Although we looked at it yesterday, I've included verse 15 so we can see Paul's full contrast between Adam and Christ.

Read the Word

Romans 5:15–17

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

grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

- Make note of the contrasts between Adam/sin and Jesus/the gift. What have been the effects of each? How are they different?

Reflect

The sin of Adam is met with the gift of God's grace. Let that sink in for a moment. As we've seen, sin brings judgment, condemnation, and death, yet these are overwhelmed by God's grace-gift that brings righteousness and life. We see the character of God in the gift he offers us in Jesus. He is merciful even as he acts to bring justice and make all things right.

Paul is contrasting Adam's ability to bring disaster on humanity through his willful disobedience and Christ's ability to bring lavish blessing to humanity despite all the countless sins he had to overcome to do this.⁴ This is something only God could do. It took divine action to bring life from humanity's sin-ravaged condition. In its weakness, humanity could only succumb to the reign of death brought by sin. These powers have ruled over us bringing chaos, fear, misery, and destruction. They separate us from each other and from our Creator.

Out of God's abundant grace, he has set us free from the tyranny of sin and death, declared us "in the right," restored us to peace, and reconciled us to himself. What's more, we will reign in life. We can only imagine what this might mean for us in the resurrected age of the new heavens and new earth, but there is a sense in which God's final rule will be exercised by God's people. "Just as the resurrected Christ is a king who has taken his position of authority at God's right hand, so believers, through their union with him, will also reign in life."⁵

Without God's powerful intervention, Adam's rebellion would have led to annihilation, and that's the way humanity's story would have ended. The Son's incarnation, sacrificial death, and resurrection not only reversed that trajectory, but set humanity on a new course with a new and glorious future.

- Although we look forward in hope, this future has massive implications for how we live now. We will be exploring these with Paul in chapters 6–8. But for today, think and pray about what it means to be out from under the reign of sin and death. What does that mean for how you live?

Pray

After reflecting on our passage for today, write out your own prayer to God. Praise and thank him for the gift of Jesus that he's graciously given to you, confess you sins, and seek the Spirit's empowerment and guidance.

⁴ Frank Theilman, *Romans*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 288.

⁵ Theilman, 290.

Day 4

Many years ago I saw an interview between a journalist and a prominent Christian leader who was active in fighting poverty and disease in the developing world. The leader expressed her frustration with the greed, corruption, war, and violence that kept aid from reaching the people who needed it most. Almost casually she remarked that this was a result of the fallen world in which we live. Human beings are inherently sinful and that's why we need a savior.

The journalist looked surprised and said something like, "Oh I don't believe that. I think most people are good. I think there are just good people who do bad things." The Christian looked suddenly exhausted as she slowly shook her head, "I don't think you've been to the places I've been."

We're coming to a couple of verses that would contradict this reporter's view of humanity. See if you can tell which ones.

Read the Word

Romans 5:18–21

¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

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

- Which verses counter the idea that we're all just "good people who do bad things." Why does our modern culture have a hard time accepting that?

Reflect

Paul took us on a slight detour so he could make a couple of important points, but now with verse 18, he is concluding the thought that he began with in verse 12. Through one man sin entered the world, so through one man God has dealt with sin to set things right.

What Paul describes here has played a significant role in how later theologians developed the doctrine of "original sin" — that all people are born into a state of sin and will inevitably sin. As Paul says here, "through the disobedience of one man, all were made sinners." As the source of all humanity (including Eve, who came from him), Adam's sin affected everyone.

Paul doesn't explain how this happens, only that it is countered by the righteous act of Jesus. Yet Lancaster speculates that "because human nature itself was in Adam and human nature itself is what is transmitted, all humans acted with Adam in that first sin, not as specific individuals but in a solidarity or participation through what makes us human."⁶

Sin fundamentally corrupted and changed humanity. For Paul though, the emphasis in Romans is not on what humanity inherited through Adam, but what has been accomplished through Christ. What sin corrupted, Jesus has renewed. Sinful humans are made right and given new life. Adam's lack of obedience was undone by Christ's complete obedience to the Father. Just as we somehow participated in Adam's sin, we participate in Christ's righteousness. This has profound implications not just for us as individuals, but for all of creation, and Paul will explore these repercussions in the coming chapters.

Paul ends this section by returning to a question about the law. Wasn't the law's purpose to bring righteousness to God's people? How could Paul say that the law increased sin? While God's law did not cause sin, once the laws were spelled out, they presented the opportunity for violation, or trespass, when breaking them. Even keeping the laws can result in sin if it's done to puff yourself up while lording your self-righteousness over others. The law draws attention to sin, and when used wrongly can even motivate it. Thus, the law has no power to defeat sin, but Jesus does. Sin reigned in death, but grace reigns "through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (5:21)

- We live in a world still corrupted by sin and ruled by death. But in Christ, believers are citizens of God's kingdom where grace reigns. As the justified, how can we show our allegiance to his kingdom?

Pray

How does this passage inspire your prayers? How does it move you to praise the Father, Son and Spirit? What are you thankful for? Are you convicted of any thoughts or actions for which you need forgiveness? What requests do you have based on what you read? Spend some time with God in prayer.

Day 5

It's Friday! How did the Spirit speak to you through God's Word this week? Take some time to slow down, reflect and pray.

⁶ Lancaster, 106.

Reflect on what you've learned

Look back at Romans 5:12–21 one more time. What's your biggest takeaway? How do you see these verses fitting in with all of chapter 5? In some ways, this is a challenging passage, so prayerfully think it through.

Make Connections

Jesus came to usher in his Kingdom and liberate humanity from the reign of sin and death. Having set aside his divinity, Jesus lived a truly human life. As a man, Jesus did all that Adam failed to do. He was tempted, really and truly tempted, to rebel against the will of God just as Adam had done. But he chose to rely on the Spirit and obey the Father.

Through his life he gave us glimpses of his kingdom, the reign of grace that brings life. By healing the sick and raising the dead, he showed us that death and corruption will lose their power. By casting out demons, he demonstrated his victory over the enemies of his reign.

Our Savior and King always acts in love. With compassion and generosity, Jesus loved the poor and the outcast. He loved his disciples and taught them well. He spoke wisdom and truth, even to those who would not receive it. He showed us that true love is acting for the good of another, even at great cost to ourselves. Jesus' death and resurrection are the ultimate demonstration of all these things.

Sometimes we act as if Jesus only lived like he did because he was the Son of God. We forget that Jesus lived dependent on the Spirit. That's precisely how we are to live. He will guide and empower us too. We don't have to follow in the path of Adam. We have been given an abundant provision of grace to follow Jesus.

Pray

Based on what you've read and reflected on this week, spend some time with your Father in prayer.

- Praise him for the gift of justification and righteousness that you've received in Christ.
- Ask for guidance as to how you should live in light of what Jesus has done for you.

What's Your Next Step?

How is the Holy Spirit prompting you? Where are you failing to obey God's clear direction? What changes do you need to make so that you can live more fully for God? How can you rely on the Spirit to guide and empower you in these changes? How can other Christians help you in your journey?