

The Gift Not Like the Sin

 Romans 5:15-17

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I want to thank Dennis for filling in for me in my absence last Sunday. It's not easy to get away and it's not easy to fill in. Lesson preparation is very difficult and time consuming so I'm very appreciative of Dennis' effort and time spent in putting together what I understand was a very good lesson on John 3:1-15.

Picking back up with our exposition of Romans we turn once again to Romans 5:12-21. I mentioned two weeks ago that this was solid doctrine distinct from milk doctrine. Paul makes this distinction in 1 Cor 3 and the author of Hebrews makes this distinction in Heb 5-6. So it is a truth that there are two categories of doctrine and that milk doctrine is for infants in Christ and solid doctrine is for the mature in Christ. There is a natural progression of growth that should take place in the Christian life. Romans 5:12-21 is definitely for the more mature in Christ and so if some of this is over your head then don't let that deter you from concentrating to pick up some solid doctrine. At this time, if you don't get it all don't let that get you down, just keep at it and the pieces will start to come together. Experiential sanctification is a process that takes years and no one grows at the same rate and no one grows up overnight and no one reaches the apex in this life. So don't worry, just take it in stride and keep growing. There is always more to learn and when you get in your resurrection body at the rapture there will still be more to learn. No one becomes omniscient in the resurrection, so we will still be learning from there forward for all eternity. So don't beat yourself up because you don't understand all of this.

Two weeks ago we took a kind of aside on some of the more difficult issues related to Romans 5:12 because this verse presents the concept that when Adam sinned death entered this domain and death spread to all men because all sinned in Adam. The question is "Why is it that death spread to all men if we did not sin in the conscious sense of Adam?" We argued that we were there in that Adam was not only acting as an individual but as mankind and since we are individual members of mankind then when he sinned we sinned by virtue of being of the same nature as Adam. However, this unconscious participation necessarily gives rise to a series of other difficult questions. First, "When exactly do we become individuals? When does each human soul begin?" Certainly we aren't individuals in Adam and thereby pre-exist as souls in Adam. That's heresy. So "When do we begin as individuals? When does each human soul begin?" We concluded that each soul begins at conception, that soul life is present in the womb. Second, "How does each individual soul originate? In other words, does

God directly create each human soul or did He do that only for Adam and then accomplish it indirectly through the parents transmitting the soul to the child?" We concluded that He does it indirectly through the parent to the child because there is no evidence to the contrary and to say that He does it directly makes Him complicit in sin because by joining a perfect soul to a sinful flesh inevitably makes Him complicit. Third, "How and when is the sin nature transmitted to the individual so that the individual is subject to death?" We concluded the sin nature is transmitted to the individual at conception by the father. These questions and answers are all very pertinent in this context because you see Jesus Christ is very prominent in this passage and yet if we all sinned in the one man Adam and the sin nature is transmitted to us by lineal descent by our father at conception then "How did Jesus avoid the sin nature being transmitted to Him at His conception?" The obvious answer is the virgin conception of Matt 1 and Luke 3 and we highlight that it is the virgin conception that is the key, not the virgin birth. The virgin birth is also true but the virgin conception is the miracle. The virgin birth is not a miracle but a necessary result of Joseph not knowing his wife until after she gave birth. So the key is the virgin conception some nine months before the birth. That is what is necessary to get a sinless individual into the human race. Conception. Burn that in your brain because it's the key and anything else is what I classify as a 'strange doctrine.' We argued and I maintain that Jesus was a sinless human soul at conception. The passage I used was Luke 1:43 and Elizabeth made a statement to Mary there when the baby Jesus was still in her womb saying, "How is it that the mother of my Lord has come to me." Elizabeth, under the inspiration of the Spirit, recognized Mary as a "mother" and the baby as her "Lord" even in the womb. These are personal titles and clear indicators that Jesus was a human soul in the womb of Mary. If it is thought that Jesus was a special case then the next verse mentions that John the Baptist in the womb leapt for joy. Here the leaping is not so much the issue but the emotion of joy. Only people have emotions of joy, not fetal tissue. So it becomes plain that soul life is at conception and not birth. Another point we argued was that God does not create each individual soul directly. He did that with Adam but from Adam forward each soul is passed on from parent to child. This explains why children have personalities reflective of their parents. If their soul was created directly by God then the similarity would not be explicable other than God took from each parent personality traits and imputed them to the individual, which sounds quite strange and has no biblical support. It also confirms what we all suspect, that sex is not a physical union only but also a spiritual union. That is why it is so important to have sex only within marriage. Sex with an individual of the opposite sex results in the two becoming one flesh and that oneness is not physical only but also spiritual. Another point we argued is that the sin nature is transmitted from the father to the child at conception. David said he was conceived in sin and this helps bring these many lines of the argument together. At conception David was a sinner and only a soul can be a sinner and so David was condemned at conception. But again, if this is so then how is it that Jesus at conception is not a condemned sinner? The answer again is the virgin conception. Jesus avoided a sin nature and consequent condemnation because he had no earthly father, He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This is why the virgin conception is so vital. By virtue of the virgin conception Jesus was cut off from the transmission of a sinful nature and thus qualified to please God, if He passed all the temptations, which He most certainly did. At the same time it is vital

to affirm that Jesus did have a human mother. Mary contributed Jesus' humanity at the conception so that Jesus is vitally connected to the human race. This was vital to fulfill the prophecy of Gen 3:15 that He would be "the seed of the woman." Jesus was therefore a true human; body and spirit, yet without sin so that He could die for the sins of all mankind. So you see there are many doctrines linked in here. Another one we just mentioned is in the statement that Jesus Christ died for the sins of all mankind and not just a subset of mankind. That is the doctrine of unlimited atonement and this doctrine is contrary to the doctrine of limited atonement which says that Christ died only for the sins of the elect and not all mankind. I would point out here that these verses in Romans 5:12-21 have historically been used to demonstrate exegetically that Christ died at least in a provisional way for the whole human race even though the application is, of course, only to those who believe.

So there are many doctrines involved in the thoughts of Romans 5:12-21 and that is why we called it the watershed of theology. How you interpret here affects a number of other doctrines and I'm particularly coming against views that say that God is charging us with the sin of Adam alone, which contradicts God's justice, and I am coming against the view that God does not charge us with sin until we commit our first conscious sin, which contradicts infant death. Those views do not hold up to exegetical scrutiny or the real world. The doctrines I've explained all hang together and if you change one you change them all. They are a vital unity and by this you see what doctrines I believe and how they fit together. Sometimes people isolate doctrines in their mind, they compartmentalize, and consequently they hold to some very strange doctrines. Paul said avoid strange doctrines. I hear a lot of strange doctrines. You shouldn't be holding to strange doctrines. That's not healthy. If you're believing something that only you or only a very few people believe it's going to isolate you and make you appear very obscure to people. That's a signal that something is out of balance. Paul warned against holding to strange doctrines. You're not original. People have thought of these things and rejected the strange views. Recognize that there is a way to bring doctrines together in a balance and if you don't do that then you end up in obscurity in some corner of the world thinking that you alone are correct and everybody else is wrong. That's not where you want to be.

In Romans 5:13-14 we said that Paul is giving an explanation for the expression "all sinned" in verse 12. "For until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law." By Law Paul is referring to the Mosaic Law which was given at Mt Sinai in 1447BC. His point is that sin was in the world prior to that Law. But how could there be sin in the world prior to the giving of the Law at Mt Sinai? Only if there was a law could sin be truly imputed. But Paul says "sin is not imputed when there is no law." In other words, sin is not charged against those who did not commit the sins of the Mosaic Law. That's not how God works. God never charges sin to the account of those who do not commit sin. He only imputes sin to the account of the one who actually sins. This is vital to understand. Impute always refers to something "charged to the account of someone"¹ but there are two ways that imputation can take place; either *legal* or *actual*. A legal imputation would be where something is charged to your account when you had no involvement. This is the doctrine of justification. We are justified on the basis of Christ's work which we had no involvement in. An actual imputation would be where something is charged to

your account when you had involvement. This is the doctrine of condemnation. We are condemned on the basis of Adam's work which we had involvement in. And what verse 13 is saying is that God did not legally impute sin to the account of those who lived prior to the Law. "Nevertheless," verse 14 says, "death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come." In other words, "If God did not legally impute sin to those before the Law then why did they die?" The answer is there must have been a Law. Yet the only law was the law of "in the day you eat of you shall surely die. So they must have somehow been involved in Adam's sin and by actual imputation had that sin credited to their account. Otherwise you can't explain their death. Sin is the only entry point of death. Without sin there can be no death. And all those people died. So they must have actually participated in Adam's sin. That is why it says they did not sin in the likeness of the offense of Adam. That means they did not commit some sin that resembled Adam's sin. Instead, how did they sin? They actually sinned Adam's sin. So the sin of Adam is actually imputed to them because they were involved in the sin, albeit not consciously of course, but nevertheless they did sin by sharing the same being and nature as Adam. And in the course of the natural propagation of the human race the sin nature was transmitted to them by their father at conception. This then has fully explained what Paul means at the end of 5:12, that "death spread to all men, because all sinned." All sinned and all are condemned not because they committed some sin that resembled Adam's sin, but because they committed the actual sin of Adam. They actually had an involvement. This is what is known as actual imputation; a crediting to one's account because of actual involvement in the act.

This is a most important point; the reason men die is because of their participation in the one sin of Adam. That sin alone condemns you apart from any personal sin. Infant death is the proof in the pudding that the one sin in Adam is the one sin that condemns. All the other personal sin that we do later is just coming out of the sin nature that we received at conception. In other words, it is just heaping condemnation on condemnation. And when you see this you realize that you are not condemned for mere personal sin, for what you did, but for who you are. You are sin and that brings the problem to a whole new level. You are sin. That is why you are condemned. What you do is irrelevant.

This is why the Lordship Salvation idea is so ridiculous. What's the Lordship Salvation idea? It's the idea that you have to repent of your sin as an act distinct from faith. They define repentance as "turning from your sin" and they make this requirement in addition to faith in order to be saved. Now, once you say you must turn from your sin then you have inevitably reduced man's problem to personal sin. Personal sin we know is something that you can repent of; you can turn from personal sin. But Paul insists that the problem isn't personal sin. The problem is the sin nature. How can you turn from who you are by nature? You cannot turn from the sin nature. The idea doesn't even make sense. L. S. Chafer saw this long ago when he said, "Those who stress repentance as a requirement along with believing, inadvertently disclose that, in their conception, the problem of personal sin is all that enters into salvation. The sin nature must also be dealt with; yet that is not a legitimate subject of repentance."² He is pointing up, of course, the sole requirement as faith. This is because there is a problem much

greater than personal sin and that is the problem of the sin nature that was transmitted to us by actual imputation from Adam to his child and from his sons to their children and so on down to our human father who transmitted the sin nature to us at our conception. So the sin nature defines us and our entire way of looking at the world.

Before we get much further let's define the sin nature so that we are clear on what it is and what it is not. What it is not is some physical component of the human body. That idea has come into people's thinking because the sin nature is sometimes referred to as the "flesh." But the word "flesh" has other meanings. Ryrie says, "the word flesh has several meanings. (1) Sometimes it simply means the material body of a person (1 Cor. 15:39). (2) Often it indicates people as a whole (Rom. 3:20). (3) But frequently it is used in Scripture to indicate the sin nature (Rom 7:18)."³ What does the word nature mean when we say sin nature? Ryrie goes on to explain, "It is far better to define nature in terms of a capacity. Thus the old nature of the flesh is that capacity which all men have to serve and please self."⁴ Chafer defined it slightly differently saying, "In seeking to analyze more specifically what the sin nature is, it should be remembered that it is a perversion of God's original creation and in that sense is an abnormal thing. Every faculty of man is injured by the Fall, and the disability to do good and the strange predisposition to evil arise from that inner confusion."⁵ In other words we weren't created sinners and something strange has entered in at the Fall, something that plagues us all, something cryptic, some disposition that leads to inevitable evil in all of us. In another place he says, "the term *nature* designates the perversion, with its unholy dispositions, which the Fall engendered."⁶ We are really messed up and in serious need of restoration. Walvoord says it is more troubling than Ryrie pointed out when he defined the sin nature as a "capacity." He said it includes the concept of a "natural tendency (or predisposition) to sin."⁷ I see the sin nature as a predisposition or inclination to sin. Sin comes quite naturally. You don't have to teach someone to sin. That is natural. The reason is because we are conceived with a sin nature, a predisposition to sin and because we have a sin nature we are condemned to death, separation from God forever. What you do is irrelevant. This concept will become very important in Romans 6-8 and the question, how can I overcome the sin nature which I still possess as a believer even though its power has been broken. We introduce it today in preparation for these vital chapters.

Today, at the end of Romans 5:14 Paul points out that Adam is a "type" of Christ. If Adam is "type" Christ is the "anti-type." The Greek word translated "type" is from *τυπος* and means "a pattern." Adam sets a pattern and Christ follows that pattern. The pattern is that both began sinless, committed one act and thereby affected everybody else by the one act. So essentially the pattern seems to be; both were born sinless, committed one act and thereby affected everybody else by the one act. However, just because both committed one act that thereby effects everybody else does not mean that they affected everybody else in the same method. I introduced earlier the distinction between legal and actual imputation and verses 15 and 16 are saying that though the two men and acts both follow the same pattern they are not the same in how they affect everybody else. Strong says, "Verses 15-17 show how the work of grace differs from, and surpasses, the work of sin."⁸

Note verse 15, the first indication that the work of grace differs from the work of sin is the word **But**. This is the Greek word *αλλα* and is the word for a strong contrast. Note the second indication where Paul says, **the free gift is not like the transgression**. What is **the free gift**? The words **free gift** is from one Greek word *χαρισμα* which means "given by grace, bestowed." It is not really necessary for the translators to add **free** since for something to be a gift it must be free. For example, sometimes we refer to our movement as the Free Grace Movement but it is not really necessary to say Free because Grace by nature is Free. We could just as well be called the Grace Movement. The same word is used again in verse 16 where it says, "on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification." And in verse 17 a word is translated "gift" but it is a different Greek word being used as a synonym. There it says "the gift of righteousness" but that word is *δωρεα*. In any case, all three uses of gift refer to the **gift** of righteousness. In other words, this righteousness, Paul says, **is not like the transgression**. What's **the transgression**? **The transgression** is from the Greek word *παρπτωμα* which means "a violation of moral standards, wrongdoing, sin." Here it is used as a synonym for **the sin** in verse 12 and 13, which was the Greek word *αμαρτια*. In all cases it has the definite article and so it is not "a transgression" but **the transgression**. It is the transgression *par excellence* just as the sin in verses 12 and 13 is the sin *par excellence*. When we saw this before we said that the sin of the one man Adam was unique in that it was a sin committed by the one "man" Adam who at the same time was all "mankind." So the sin was entirely unique and verse 16 says that it was this one transgression that brought condemnation. Paul is insisting in verse 15 that **the free gift** that brought righteousness is not like **the transgression** that brought condemnation.

But how is it not like **the transgression**? It would seem like both came by one man and both came by one act, so how are they not alike? The Greek word translated **For** begins the explanation. **The free gift is not like the transgression for if by the transgression of the one many died, much more, did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many**. The major difference is signaled by the words **gift** and **grace** used with the righteousness but not with the condemnation. What is **grace**? **Grace** is unmerited favor. The difference then is that the righteousness is unmerited but the condemnation is merited. We did not act with Christ in bringing righteousness but we did act with Adam in bringing condemnation. The gift of righteousness in Christ is a grace gift but the condemnation in Adam is strict justice. Strong says it this way, "Over against God's exact justice in punishing all for the first sin which all committed in Adam, is set the gratuitous [i.e. unmerited] justification of all who are in Christ. Adam's sin is the act of Adam and his posterity together; hence the imputation to the posterity is just, and merited. Christ's obedience is the work of Christ alone; hence the imputation of it to the elect is gracious and unmerited."⁹ In other words, here we see the two kinds of imputation; both actual and legal. The actual imputation is the one which we actually took part in, namely, the one sin of Adam, and this means that our condemnation is in keeping with God's justice. However, the legal imputation is the one in which we take no part in, namely, the one work of Christ, and this means that our justification is in keeping with God's grace. So our condemnation is based on God's justice applied to us by actual imputation. God never judges us for something we have not actually done; but our justification is based

on God's grace applied to us by legal imputation. God never justifies us for something we have actually done. So then there is a difference between the free gift and the transgression.

We would play up the emphasis of **grace** that Paul makes in the verse. Note that we find three expressions: 1) **the free gift...** 2) **the grace of God...** and 3) **the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ.** These expressions stand in stark contrast to our condemnation in Adam. Our condemnation was not a gift of God's grace; we earned condemnation by our participation in Adam's sin; but the justification Christ freely gives we did not earn. He gave it to us freely as a gift. That is what makes it **grace**. A gift can't be earned otherwise it's no longer a gift given but a payment for what is due. So we see again that the **grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ** is widely different from **the transgression** that resulted in condemnation simply because we merited our condemnation in Adam but we in no way merited the gift of justification by the one Man, Jesus Christ. He acted entirely alone and on our behalf, to bring the riches of the grace of God to us freely by a legal imputation of His righteousness to our account through faith.

A final point to ponder is Paul's use of **the many** in verse 15. **By the transgression of the one many died and by the grace of one Man, Jesus Christ the grace of God abounded to the many.** So does that mean that all were condemned in Adam but all will be counted righteous in Christ? In other words, does this teach universalism? Universalism is the belief that all men will be saved; there is a very large universalist church in San Antonio that I always see at the I-10/410 junction. Does this verse teach that all men will be saved? It should be obvious to the Bible student that **the many** in each case is not identical because the Bible teaches against universalism. For example, if all will be saved then how at the Great White Throne Judgment in Rev 20:14-15 are there men who are "thrown into the lake of fire" which is stated to be "the second death." So **the many**, in each case here, cannot be referring to the same number of people. The many in the first case is referring to each and every individual without exception but the many in the second case is referring to each and every individual who has faith. The One condition set forth universally in Scripture for a man to be justified is faith. Rom 4:5, "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." John 3:18, "He who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed." Acts 16:31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life" are a few of the 150 plus examples. Clearly then this is not teaching universalism. The **many** in the first case does refer to each and every individual but the many in the second case refers to each individual who has faith as Paul has taught here in Romans and elsewhere.

Now to show you that the Bible speaks this way commonly turn to 1 Cor 15:22. This passage does not use the expression **the many** but instead uses the word "all." Yet it is clear that the "all" in the passage is being used in two different senses. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive." Again, if "all" means the same thing in both usages then you are back to universalism. But this denies many hundreds of other Scriptures that

say only those who have faith will be made alive. So “all” must not mean the same thing in both uses. It must mean “all” without exception die in Adam but only all who believe in Jesus Christ will be made alive. The same thing is true in Romans 5:15. **The many** are not to be understood as the exact same group. **The many without** exception are condemned in Adam but the many *with* exception are justified in Christ.

Now the main point in all this, and we’ll have to stop here, is this; all men are responsible for their condemnation in Adam but Jesus Christ alone is responsible for our justification. Condemnation is what we all earned; justification is what those who by faith receive as a free gift. So then as verse 15 said, the free gift is *not* like the trespass. Both men began sinless, both did one act and both acts affected others, but not in the same method. Adam’s sin affected others by actual imputation due to our actual participation in that one sin. This revealed God’s justice. But Christ’s work affected others by legal imputation, we had no participation in His cross work. This work revealed God’s grace! And how great is that grace that it would come to me, a sinner. And that grace can come to you too, simply believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall receive the free gift of salvation.

¹ Cf BDAG, entry for *ελλογεω*, p 319.

² L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, p 375.

³ Stanley Gundry, *Five Views on Sanctification*, p 205.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 205.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 206.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 206.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p 205.

⁸ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 626.

⁹ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 627.