

Grace Will Reign

📖 Romans 5:18-21

👤 Pastor Jeremy Thomas

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🌐 fbgbible.org

📍 Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin Street

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

(830) 997-8834

Let's review how the grammar outlines the passage and then we'll finish the chapter and draw some conclusions. I'm giving you the grammatical outline because it impacts the meaning of the text. So this is not an imposed outline—this is not how I think it should be outlined. This is in the grammar. Note that 5:12 says that one man Adam brought sin into the world and that death entered the world through sin and the fact that death spread to all men because all sinned. At the end of verse 12 you see a dashed line, which signifies that it's an incomplete sentence. This has bothered many a Greek grammarian. But Paul stops because he realizes that he needs to give evidence that all men sinned in Adam. The evidence in 5:13-14 amounts to showing that all men died before God's Law was given at Mt Sinai. And if all men died then that means that all men sinned somehow, otherwise they wouldn't have died. And further, the verses go on to show it was by one sin that they all died and not by billions of sins. And so all men must have sinned in Adam in that his sin was not only a personal sin, but a race-wide sin, because he was at the same time the entire human race. Verse 18 is picking up with what Paul would have gone on to say in verse 12 if he did not think he needed to give evidence that all men sinned in Adam. So verses 13-17 are a parenthesis in Paul's thought that begins in verse 12 and picks back up in verse 18. A. T. Robertson says, "Paul resumes the parallel between Adam and Christ begun in verse 12 and interrupted by explanation (13f.) and contrast (15–17)."¹ By the word "resumes" Robertson shows that he sees vv 13-17 in the same way I do, as a parenthesis. So if Paul had actually finished verse 12 we know from verses 18-19 what it would have read like. Murray says, "We are thus left in no doubt as to what verse 12 would have been if the comparison had been completed."² It would have said, "Therefore as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned, even so through one man righteousness entered into the world and life through righteousness, and so life spread to all men, because they were counted righteous." There is the great contrast between the two great men and their two great acts.

So today we will delve into what Paul would have said in verse 12 if he did not pause in vv 13-17 to interrupt his train of thought. As we look at it note one obvious difference between verses 18 and 19. Verse 18 speaks of the two acts and their consequences; the men themselves are not mentioned. Whereas, verse 19 speaks of the two men as well as their acts and their consequences. As far as similarities, verse 18 and verse 19 both use the

formula **even so** to show a close parallel between the two acts, the two men and the fact there are consequences. What we are to see in both verses is that the two acts committed by the two men have universal implications. The one transgression affected all men and the one act of righteousness affected all men; the one act of disobedience affected all men and the one act of obedience affected all men. I would point out that these two acts are the farthest reaching acts in all the history of the world. Who won the super bowl last year and who won the presidency is, by comparison, insignificant. What these two men did is extremely significant. One transgression and one only brought condemnation to all men and one act of righteousness and one only brought justification of life to all men.

Starting with verse 18 Paul uses the words **so then** to signal that this is the conclusion of his argument from 5:12ff.³ And I think, in a sense the conclusion to everything in the condemnation and justification section from 1:18-5:11. It's interesting that he sort of ties these two sections together before he moves on to sanctification in chapter 6. Just remember that because I think Paul does the same type of thing in 8:1 when he starts to finish up sanctification and transition to glorification. These are your three tenses of salvation; justification, sanctification and glorification, and we're wise to see that these are the remedy to our condemnation and that each is by grace through faith and never by works.

Note the contrast between **condemnation** and **justification** in 5:18. **So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.** Three things need to be noted. First, the transgression. What is a **transgression**? In this context it is used as a synonym for sin. The technical meaning of the term **transgression** is a "violation of a moral standard, *an offense, wrongdoing, sin.*" What offense exactly is in view? The **one** offense is the eating of the forbidden tree which is a violation of Gen 2:17. Second, what were the **results** of this one **transgression**? **Condemnation.** What is **condemnation**? **Condemnation** is a "verbal pronouncement of guilty." God has a court over which He presides. This court and its decisions are based on His holy character. Therefore, when He pronounces someone guilty it is a perfect verdict. So the verdict of **condemnation** refers to the legal guilt that renders a person separate from God relationally. They are under the penalty of sin. Third, what is the extent of the condemnation? It is universal, **to all men.** So there was but one transgression but it resulted in condemnation to the entire human race. We are all conceived in condemnation for the transgression which we committed in Adam. We are not to think of ourselves as condemned for some other sin we committed, such as our first personally conscious sin. There is only one sin we are all condemned for, the one sin of eating the forbidden tree and this sin of Adam who is both a man and mankind is therefore one of the most far reaching acts in the history of the world. All evil, all chaos, all death is a consequence of that one sin.

In the middle of the verse Paul says **even so** in order to indicate that what follows is an act that is parallel to the act we just considered. **Even so through one act of righteousness there resulted life to all men.** Three things again need to be noted. First, what is **righteousness**? Here it is "an action that meets expectations as to what is

right or just, *righteous deed*." What exact action is in view? The **one** action of dying on the tree for the sins of the whole world. Second, what are the stated **results** of this one act of righteousness? **Justification of life**. Justification we have seen many times. What is justification? It is the "verbal pronouncement of righteous" that removes the guilty verdict that stood over us before. God declares those who receive His Son to be righteous in His court of law at the moment they believe in Him, even while ungodly (Rom 4:5). Third, what does **life** refer too? This is the first time **justification** has been appended to the words **of life** so that we have the expression **justification of life**. There may be many things that one may think of when he reads the term **life**; eternal life, resurrection life, life in the kingdom. What exactly does Paul mean by **life**? The true meaning comes into focus when we understand that verse 18 is the completion of verse 12. In 5:12 we said that through the one man Adam sin entered into the world, and death through sin. Since the death there looks back to Adam in the garden then whatever death or deaths Adam faced as a consequence of his sin must be reversed by Christ on the cross in the life or lives that He imparts. How then did Adam die? He died two ways. First, a spiritual death. In Gen 2:17 God said, "In the day you eat thereof you shall surely die!" That this must have been a spiritual death is evidenced by the fact that on the day Adam ate he did not die physically. Instead he died spiritually as evidenced by his covering up with fig leaves and hiding from God. Second, a physical death. In Gen 3:17, after God sought out Adam and began to curse him for his sin God said, "from dust you were taken and to dust you shall return." So then there are two deaths referred to in Romans 5:12, there is Adam's spiritual death and there his physical death and these deaths were transmitted to the human race through procreation. Since death in 5:12 is both spiritual and physical then the **life** in verse 18 must also be both spiritual and physical. What Adam brought in must be reversed by Christ and must, in fact, go further to a status where we may never fall into any death ever again.

There is a close connection then between condemnation and death and also between justification and life. This is why Paul refers to it as the **justification of life**. To put this together, what happens is you are born condemned and dead in your transgressions and sins but through the work of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the preaching of the gospel you believe in Christ and at that moment God made a verbal pronouncement declaring you righteousness in His court in heaven. That verdict gave you a legal standing with Him. That's tense one of salvation. Simultaneously He also imparted spiritual life to you, which we know as eternal life. Eternal life is your new regenerate nature or self, a capacity that has the opposite predisposition of your sin nature. The regenerate nature has a predisposition to pleasing God. This new nature or self is the conduit through which the fruit of the Spirit is produced when you depend upon Him. However, at the same time it is important to understand that just because you have a new nature it does not mean that your old sinful nature has been eradicated. You still have the sinful nature, otherwise you couldn't sin. But what the new nature does is give you a new capacity to love God and live before God in a pleasing way. The Holy Spirit is the one who produces the fruit through your new nature as you depend upon Him. Ultimately, when you get into the resurrection life your sinful nature will be eradicated and then you will truly live eternally since you'll never sin again.

So **life** is a huge concept, it is the opposite of **death**, but not really in the sense that most people think. Life essentially is being in a close relational connection with God whereas death is being in a separation from God relationally. So when we look at an unbeliever and the Bible says that an unbeliever is dead in his transgression and sins it means that he is separated from God in a relational sense. It doesn't mean he doesn't know God in a cognitive sense. He does know God cognitively. Otherwise he could not be held accountable. But he does not know Him relationally. He is dead to God and the things of God. But when we look at a believer the Bible says that he is connected to God in a relational sense. He both knows God cognitively and relationally. He is alive in Christ and has been given a new nature that as he lives in dependence upon the Holy Spirit it serves as the conduit through which the fruit of the Spirit is produced. Finally, in the resurrection he will have life in the fullest sense because he will no longer have a sinful nature with its desires but will always desire God and always live continuously in close fellowship with God. That indeed is the fullest concept of life and it is what we are destined for as believers. John says it this way in 1 John, "We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is." When we see Him forevermore we will enjoy life forevermore in an unbroken, continuous sense.

So life is really about being in a close relational connection with God. As believers we can enjoy life now as long as we depend upon Him, but we can also experience death when we do not depend upon Him because death is the idea of a separation from that close relational connection with God that is caused by personal sin and knocks us out of fellowship. So we can enjoy life now or not but ultimately we will enjoy life in its fullest sense when we receive our resurrection bodies. All that is tied up in **justification of life** and what it does is totally contrast with death. The logical order then is that when we believe God justifies us, declaring us legally righteous, regenerates us, giving us eternal life and at the last will resurrect us, giving us the kind of life in which we can dwell in close connection with Him forever.

Finally, note that this **justification of life** is said to be **to all men** just as the **condemnation** earlier in the verse was said to be **to all men**. Does this mean universalism? Surely in the first part of the verse the condemnation is universal. If the second part of the verse is taken identically with the first then there is universal justification! But this is not so because in the greater context of Romans 3-5 there is a condition that must be met for justification of life and that is faith, a faith apart from works, faith in Christ. In verse 17 the synonym for faith is used; receive, those who receive Jesus Christ. So we would say that in the context "What the apostle is interested in showing is not the numerical extent of those who are justified as identical with the numerical extent of those condemned but the parallel that obtains between the way of condemnation and the way of justification."⁴ There is a parallel in that both legal status' result because of one act. All who are condemned are condemned on the basis of one act. All who are justified are justified on the basis of one act. The difference is that the all who are justified are only those who receive Him. This is not strange in Paul's writings since he used the same essential language in 5:15, 19 and 2 Cor 15:22. In the end, Paul's point in verse 18 is to pick up the thought of verse 12 and go beyond the one transgression that brought condemnation to the one act of righteousness that brought justification.

Verse 19 begins with the word **for** which in the Greek is a word of explanation. Here we see not only the two acts but the two men mentioned explicitly so that there is no question who the two men are who committed the two farthest reaching acts in the history of the world. **For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.** Let's make some initial observations. First, note that the verse uses **even so** just like verse 19 used **even so**. This is to show again that there is a close parallel between these two men and the two acts of the two men. Second, a new idea is seen here in that the **one man's** transgression is viewed as an act of **disobedience**. Beforehand we were told that it was sin and that it was an offense but now we are told that it was **disobedience**. Each word points to a distinct aspect of the act in order to give the whole picture of Adam's sin. The Greek word for **disobedience** is *παρακοη* which etymologically means "against to hear" and therefore "a refusal to listen and so to be disobedient." Adam, by his sin in the garden, was refusing to listen to the voice of God, opting instead to listen to the voice of his wife (Gen 3:17). It is interesting to see how closely the Bible connects listening to obeying. There is a hint here that the one we listen to most is the one we will obey the most and I would suggest to you that that is a key to life. Adam put the importance of what his wife said above what God said. This led to **disobedience**. Who are you listening to the most?

Now it was Adam's one act of **disobedience** that constituted **the many to be made sinners**. This statement supports the doctrine of seminalism or real participation in Adam's sin that we suggested beforehand in 5:12. It is not that Adam sinned and we are counted sinners because of his sin. It is rather that he sinned and we sinned in him. It was one sin but all participated in that sin. Murray says, "In the preceding verses we found that death passed on to all men by reason of the sin of Adam (vss. 12, 14, 15, 17). We found also that condemnation was pronounced upon all men through the sin of Adam (vss. 16, 18). Implicit in these reiterated declarations is the solidarity that existed between Adam and posterity. It would have been a necessary inference from the solidarity in death and condemnation to posit a solidarity in sin also, because death and condemnation presuppose sin. But we are not left to inference. The apostle is now explicit to the effect that the solidarity extended to sin itself." We sinned in Adam and thus by **the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners**. The **many** being as in verse 18, a note of universal involvement. The disobedience of the one man involved all men because Adam was at the same time one man and all men.

By that one act of disobedience Paul says **the many were made sinners**. The concept of us being **made sinners** is the concept that we are sinners by nature. This again is introducing the sinful nature that we all possess from conception. David said, "In sin my mother conceived me." That is not to say that the act of conceiving David was sinful but that David at conception was sinful. The sinful nature refers to "a predisposition to evil." We are all conceived with a predisposition to evil. We may not all act on that predisposition to the same degree but we all have that predisposition. This predisposition is inherent to us due to the one disobedience of Adam. Thus making him one of the two men who has influenced the human race more than any other.

In the middle of the verse we find the other man, Jesus Christ. **Even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.** Again, it is clear that the **One** is Jesus Christ but here His one act is stated to be an act of **obedience**. This word is *υπακοη* and etymologically means “to listen under” and so “to listen so as to obey.” Again, listening is closely related to obeying. The one we listen to the most we obey the most. Who do you listen to the most? The voice of men or the voice of God? Jesus Christ listened to the voice of the Father over all voices and that is why He ultimately obeyed the Father. Isaiah predicted that Jesus Christ would rise early every morning and listen to the voice of His Father. Hebrews attests that He learned obedience as a Son. Philippians states that He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. The **obedience** of the one man refers to the cross work of Christ. It was not the nails that held Him to the cross; it was His obedience to the Father. As He said Himself, “Not My will but Thy will be done!” The cross is the pre-eminent act of obedience. Jesus Christ held Himself upon the cross until “It is finished! *τετελεσται!*” Arguably the greatest word in the entire NT. Only when it was finished was it permitted that His body be removed from the cross and buried as the physical evidence that the sin of the world had been paid for!

By this one act of obedience Paul says **the many will be made righteous**. Sometimes much is made of the word **made**, *καθιστημι*, attached to **righteousness** as if it means something more than the legal declaration of guilt that Paul has been speaking of. But to introduce some new concept of righteousness at this time is not appropriate in the summary of the argument. Paul is just reiterating that we are declared righteous.

Finally, note once more that he says **the many will be made righteous** whereas in the first part of the verse he says **the many were made sinners**. The first reference is to each and every individual without exception. Does this mean that we are forced to take the second reference as to each and every individual without exception? Surely not because that would be universalism and other passages clearly contradict universalism. What Paul means to say from the parallel is that both acts relate to all men. Adam’s work relates to all men in that it makes them all sinners but Christ’s work relates to all men in that it makes righteousness available for all. While the enjoyment is only for those who receive Him.

This is one reason, among many, that we maintain that Christ died for the each and every individual without exception, what is called unlimited atonement, because here it is shown clearly that the righteousness is available for all. Unlimited atonement is the idea that God the Father’s intention with the death of God the Son was to provide a satisfactory payment for the sins of each and every individual and to limit the application of the payment to those who believe. It is the one point of the five points of Calvinism that has historically been the most controversial. The controversy began with Jacobus Arminius who pointed to 1 John 2:2 which says, “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not ours only but also for those of the whole world.” Arminius felt that the expression “whole world” referred to each and every individual and that John was teaching that their sins were paid for. When we look at John 8:24 Jesus said, “For unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” The reason they will die in their sins is because while Christ paid for their sins they do not receive the payment made

for their sins. So the impetus in unlimited atonement is not on what Christ has done for you but whether you have believed in Christ. Many people reject unlimited atonement because they think that if Christ died for each and every individual then each and every individual would be saved. In other words, they argue that the cross does not just provide salvation but it actually saves. This view, however, does not account for the multitude of verses that teach that the cross saves on the condition that the individual believe. They retort that if we have to believe then salvation is left up to man and his faith is a work. To this we retort that salvation is not left up to man for no man would believe apart from God's pre-salvation work and that belief itself is not a work but in being persuaded of the gospel or receiving the free gift of salvation. In any case, this is one verse that shows that the extent of Christ's work goes as far as Adam's work and since Adam's work extends to all men then Christ's work extends to all men as well. The all-important point in the immediate context is that the individual must have faith in order to enjoy the benefits of Christ's work, which is **being made righteous** in a forensic sense.

Now, having pointed up the typology between Adam and Christ, the two men who affected the human race by one act each in the most extensive fashion, in Romans 5:20 Paul has a word to say about the Law given at Mt Sinai. He has mentioned the Law before the letter in 2:17 where he addressed the Jews as those who "relied upon the Law" and "were instructed out of the Law" and in 3:20 where he affirmed that "by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" and in 3:21 as a source for the prediction of the coming Messiah who is the righteousness of God and in 5:13 as the point in human history prior to which sin was in the world and death reigned. He now senses that he needs to give another word relative to a purpose of the Law. This is not the only purpose. There are other purposes stated elsewhere, but this is the purpose most relevant to the doctrine of sin and justification that Paul is unfolding. Therefore, in 5:20 he says, **The Law came in so that the transgression would increase.** The word **came in** in the Greek means "to slip in" or "to come in as a side issue." Why does it say it was slipped in? Because the Law was not the central issue in the OT. What was the central issue? The coming Messiah who is the righteousness of God. Why was it slipped in then? In order to more poignantly reveal man's sin. There was already sin in the world but when a specific verbal commandment came in it revealed the sin in a more pointed fashion. When a boy does something wrong he knows its wrong but when it is stated to be wrong by his father the issue is put in a whole new light. That is what the Law did. God, as the Father of Israel, was stating very clearly what was sinful and therefore the Jew knew much more poignantly that it was sinful. But that creates something else that Paul will develop in chapter 7 and that is the concept that once a thing is pointed out to be sinful it becomes something we want to do even more, that is to say, **the transgression would increase.** In other words, if I tell my son, do not get into those cookies then I can almost guarantee you that now he will want to get into the cookies. This is the way the sinful nature works. If the sinful nature is given a law then the sinful nature will press against the Law in order to break the Law. That is why Paul says the Law was given that sin would **increase.** John Murray says, "The more explicit the revelation of law the more heinous and aggravated are the violations of it." The Law really points up the sinfulness of sin and thereby shows that we are not righteous before God. This was a purpose of the Law so that Jews would not seek to establish their

righteousness with God, but rather look to the promised Messiah to provide the righteousness necessary to be right with God. Thus the Law was to provoke them to turn to faith. As Paul says in Gal 3:24, “the Law was a tutor to lead us to Messiah, so that we may be justified by faith.”

Paul says at the end of verse 20, **but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more**. The amount of sin against the background of the Law pointed up the superabundance of the grace of God. The Greek word **abounded** is the intensified form and we might translate “super-abounded.” It super-abounded because it made super-evident that God’s stance toward sinners must be one of unmerited favor or else we will all simply die in our transgressions and sins and be under the reign and terror of eternal death. But God’s **grace** super-abounded **all the more** to outpace and surpass **sin**.

Verse 21 states the purpose that grace abounded all the more, **so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord**. In order to give the stark background for the reign of grace the reign of sin in death is set out first. Sin reigned in that we all sinned in Adam and we all committed our own personal sins as evidenced in **death**, both spiritual and physical. But ultimately **grace** will reign through Christ’s donation of His own righteousness which is **to the end of eternal life**. Those justified not only have eternal life now but will have it in its fullest sense in the future resurrection. All this is mediated **through Jesus Christ who is our Lord**. We do not make Him Lord, He is our **Lord**. Paul is thinking of Jesus Christ as the exalted and glorified One who is the Commander of our lives. We are to submit to Him in all things but that is getting ahead of ourselves since that is the subject of chapters 6-8. The point here is to close his discussion on justification and transition to his discussion on sanctification. The title **Lord** is a fitting conclusion because He has every right to command our lives. The only issue now will be how we are to submit to His Lordship in order to be sanctified. The mention of Christ as Lord is a fitting word of transition from justification, tense one, to sanctification, tense two. As we set our minds on the word of God and submit to His Lordship we grow spiritually.

¹ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ro 5:18.

² John Murray, *Romans*, p 199.

³ Cf A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, Rom 5:18.

⁴ John Murray, *Romans* p 203.