

In Adam and in Christ

A Study on Romans 5:12-21

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Romans has already shown us that all men are sinners separated from God and condemned (Rom. 1:12–3:20), but that God can and will declare righteous the person who accepts his only answer to the sin problem: the death of Christ. Romans 5 discusses the “by faith way.” The first five verses show that this way will stand the most severe trials and testings, and that God uses these things to build and strengthen the Christian. Verses 6-11 show that the “by faith way” will not fail because if God loved us and saved us when we were his enemies, will he love us much more and do much more for us when we are his friends! Surely he will take his friends to complete salvation.

Now in Romans 5:12-21, Paul will prove that the “by faith way” will conquer even death. His point is that death in Adam has been conquered in Christ. The main thought of this section is the imputing (reckoning) of the sin of Adam to every member of the human race. That God would hold humanity responsible for the sin of Adam is beyond human reasoning, but we are dealing with divine revelation. Surely God’s ways are not our ways. The imputation of Adam’s sin to the human race is not popular among men, even men who profess to be Christians, but it is scriptural. Apart from understanding imputed sin, there can be little appreciation of the salvation provided in Christ. Many theologians consider Romans 5:12-21 the key to orthodoxy. A person’s soundness in the Christian faith may be determined by how he handles this section of Scripture.

THE CAUSE OF DEATH — Romans 5:12-14

In his original state, Adam had everything provided for him. God gave him a test to show whether he was in subjection to God — he was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Would he do the will of God? Adam, by an act of his own will, chose against God. His sin not only affected him, but it affected the whole human race.

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world.” Paul did not think of the account of the Fall as a legend or myth, but as an actual historical event. Sin entered the world when Adam fell. The doctrine of imputed sin is that the original sin of Adam is put to the account of every member of the human race at birth.

“And death by sin.” The reference here is primarily to physical death. The Bible speaks of three kinds of death: (1) *physical* death: separation of the body from the soul; (2) *spiritual* death: separation of the soul from God in time; and (3) *eternal* death: separation of

soul and body from God for all eternity. This passage is primarily about physical death, but it may include spiritual death as well. Paul's point is that physical death is a result of sin that entered the world through Adam.

“And so death passed upon all men.” Death passed through all men for all men have sinned. Death is universal because sin is universal.

“For [because] all have sinned.” The verse actually says “all sinned,” and is not a reference to personal acts of sin but to the fact that all men sinned in Adam. Had we been there in Eden, we would have done the same thing. Adam, representing all humanity, sinned, and this sin was put to the account of every person born into this world.

When the president declares war, he does so for the whole nation. Just so, Adam made a choice that was binding on the whole human race.

Paul might go one step further and think of all men as actually being in Adam, in both a spiritual and seminal sense such that when Adam chose, the human race chose because they were actually seminally present in Adam. An example of this thinking can be found in Hebrews 7:9-10 where it is said that Levi paid tithes in Abraham. Adam's sin was then put to the account of every person born into the world.

Theological question: Is it fair for God to impute sin to all men and punish them for it? *Answer:* This may be difficult to understand, but if God said he did it, then that is the case. God has a sovereign right to do anything he pleases, and does not have to consult his creatures before doing it!

The principle of the act of one affecting many is taught in Scripture. Some examples are:

1. God brings “the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation” (Ex. 34:6-7).
2. The curse pronounced on Canaan (Gen. 9:22-25) fell on his posterity. Also, it resulted not from Canaan's sin, but from Ham's sin.
3. Esau's selling of his birthright excluded his descendants from the covenant of promise.
4. Because of David's sin it was said, “The sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and has taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife” (2 Sam. 12:10).

“For until the law sin was in the world.” Before the Mosaic Law was ever given, sin was in the world.

“But sin is not imputed when there is no law.” The Mosaic Law was written revelation, and to break it was transgression. All men from Adam to Moses were in rebellion to God, but their sin was not reckoned as transgression to written law.

“Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.” In the period between Adam and Moses, men still died. They died because of imputed sin. Some people who had done no acts of sin, such as children, still died, showing that they must have sinned in Adam. Death is the result of sin.

“Who is the figure [type] of him that was to come.” Adam is said to be a type of Christ. A type is something that prefigures or foreshadows a future divine reality. How is Adam a type of Christ? (1) Adam is head of the human race; Christ is head of the spiritual race. (2) In both Adam and Christ, we see the unity of the many in one. We see how the act of each one affects the future of others.

THE REIGN OF LIFE OVER DEATH — Romans 5:15-17

In this section Paul contrasts the work of Christ for men and the work of Adam. Each is a representative head of a race.

“But not as the offense, so also is the free gift.” The one act of Adam brought destruction to the human race; the one act of Christ in his death brought salvation to all in the human race who will believe.

“For if [since] through the offence of one many be dead.” Adam’s sin brought physical and spiritual death to many.

“Much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.” In his death, Jesus Christ has provided the gift of justification (declared righteous) to those who are the objects of God’s grace.

“And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification.” Adam’s act brought judgment and condemnation to all men, but Christ’s work, as the representative head of all who believe, can justify.

“For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.” Adam’s offence brought physical and spiritual death to the human race. But those under the headship of Christ have received righteousness and shall reign in life (eternal life) because of God’s grace. The “by faith way” will most certainly take us to heaven, for the Christian will reign in life with Christ who is his head.

SUMMARY — Romans 5:18-19

“Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation.” Adam’s sin imputed to the human race brought judgment and condemnation to it.

“So by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” Through the righteous act of Christ in his death for sin, the free gift of justification came upon all men. The “all” here is limited to all who believe, those who receive (v. 17), those who are the elect. If this were not the case, we would have universalism.

Justification is a free gift to all who believe in Jesus Christ. The offer is universal, but it is effective only for those who believe in Christ. Every man in Adam reaped the results of Adam’s fall, and just so every man in Christ reaps the benefits of Christ’s work in salvation.

“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made (constituted) sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made (constituted) righteous.” Adam’s act made many sinners. Christ’s act of atonement made many righteous.

DEATH AND SUPERABOUNDING GRACE — Romans 5:20-21

“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound.” The Mosaic Law was given to stir sin, and to prove to men that they are sinners in need of Jesus Christ, who alone can forgive sins. The Law proves sin to be transgression.

A fellow passenger on a plane said that he thought to keep the Ten Commandments was enough. But when I asked if he had kept them, his answer was, “No.” The Law only proved him a sinner who needed Christ.

“But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” The Law showed the horribleness of sin that was imputed in Adam. But grace superabounds. God can overrule sin and death with grace, and give eternal life to all who will receive Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour.

“That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” Death has reigned in Adam, but grace will reign in righteousness to all who will believe in Jesus Christ. The result will be eternal life.

This proves that the “by faith way,” justification, will work and complete our salvation, for death in Adam has been conquered in Christ.

CONCLUSION

Do you know that you have the free gift of justification? Do you have the assurance that your life is right before God? Do you desire to have eternal life? If you long for these things, you must admit that you are a condemned sinner in Adam and turn to Jesus Christ. He alone can forgive your sin and give you perfect righteousness and eternal life. If you will believe in Jesus Christ, you may have the assurance that death has been conquered for you in Christ.