

## The Gospel Story: Through Christ

*A Study of Romans*

**Romans 5:12-21**

Pastor Bryan Clark

Over the years I've concluded that everybody, at the end of the day, lives his or her own belief system. We could have a discussion about what you say you believe but the true measurement of what you actually believe, at the deepest level of your being, is evident by how you live your life every day. If that's true, why do so many Christians struggle? Why do we struggle to find joy? Why do we struggle to find peace? Why do we struggle to find the abundant life that Jesus promised? One could only conclude: either we don't understand the truth or we don't choose to believe the truth. One of the things I've concluded over the years is: I don't think we as Christians actually believe much of what we say we believe. We just don't. Our lives give evidence we don't really believe it. I can do my best to help you understand it but you have to choose whether or not you're going to believe it.

With that in mind I invite you to turn with us this morning to Romans, Chapter 5. We're in this *therefore* section of Romans, meaning the argument just continues to build the thought process: *because* this is true, *then* this is true, *then* this true. They're like links in a chain. Last time we were in Romans, we were in chapter 5, verse 1: **Therefore, having been justified by faith...**which he explained in chapters 3 and 4: what that means; what the result of that is—we have peace with God. The results of **...having been justified** is: we have peace. The argument then in Romans 5 was: *if God*, when we were enemies still so loved us that He would justify us and He would reconcile us from enemy to friend, if God did that, why would you think that He would now let you down that you're friends? If God's done the hard part already, why do you think that He would fail you in the easy part? It's summarized in verses 8, 9 and 10 of chapter 5:

**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.** (\*NASB, Romans 5: 8-10)

Now, what does that mean? I think that's what the second half of chapter five is explaining: what *does* that mean? So we get another *therefore*. Because this is true, then he wants to explain it further. Now I have to tell you that this second half of Romans 5 is one of the most confusing sections of the book of Romans. It often feels like it's kind of going in circles and you get to the end of this and it's easy to say, "I don't get that! What was the point?" So we're going to try and stay true to the main point. We may not analyze every word and phrase but try to get: what *is* the point. Paul uses a familiar technique; he uses it often. It's basically a technique that argues, "Just as...so then". Just as this is true—and we know it is—so then...he makes another point. That's the way this is framed.

**Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—** (vs. 12)

The **one man** is Adam. The best way to understand this text is: it is a comparison and mostly a contrast between the first Adam and the second Adam, meaning Christ. What did the first Adam do and what did the second Adam do and how does it affect our lives on a daily basis? If I was to ask you the question, "What are the two most significant moments in all of human history," what would you say? And I suppose we could have a meaningful discussion around that topic. But, according to Paul, the two most significant moments in all of human history that most directly affect your everyday life at the most practical level were what the first Adam did and what the second Adam did. And that's what he talks about in this text. He says ...**through one man** [*that's the first Adam*] **sin entered into the world, and death through sin.**

Because of Adam's choice to sin against God, then death enters into the narrative. Now there's some argument as to whether this is referring to spiritual death or physical death, but most commentators say *both* and I think that's the most logical answer. The two are related; you can't really talk about one without the other. Because of spiritual death—which is separation from God—part of the outflow of that is physical death. Now I like to think of physical death as a metaphor. It's a picture of the greater death. Whether you live to be 40 years old or 60 years old or 80 years old, we are still all in a process of dying. From the day I take my first breath, that's part of the story. That is a result of a decision made by the first Adam; death entered into the picture. Now we accept death; we often say, "It's just part of the life cycle. You know, it's part of the circle of life and all that kind of stuff—death is natural." But that's really not true. Death is not natural; it's unnatural. It was never God's intention for death to part of the narrative. We might look at the science; we might look at how the body breaks down; we can look at all that stuff. And all that is, is evidence of the chaos that's come about by sin. But God never intended for death. Death entered the story because of sin and, specifically, because of the sin of the first Adam, death spread to all men. Now if you happen to be one of those people who takes Genesis 1 as more figurative than literal and you believe that God's creation happened over a process and not in six literal days—and there are many godly people who hold that position—one of the things you have to wrestle with is: how does that process work with no death? The Bible is very clear that death does not enter the picture until Adam's choice to sin. Sin brings forth death and death spread to all people. The last part of that verse, though, is where it gets a little bit hard to understand...**so death spread to all men, because all sinned—**

Now the grammar here is really important. It doesn't say: *because all are sinners*, even though that's true. The grammar is: **all sinned**—past tense—specifically at a moment in time. There's no question the text is saying: when Adam sinned, we all sinned...somehow with Adam. And, therefore, we all live with the consequences of that choice. Now you say, "How does that work? How is that possible?" My answer is, "I don't know!" I'm pretty good at that phrase. (laughter) I don't know; there are different views. Some say: maybe it's forensic, that we were genetically in Adam so the whole human race has come out, so since we were all there in Adam, we all sinned with him. Others say Adam was the representative of the human race so when Adam sinned, he sinned for all of us, so we all sinned with Adam. The Bible doesn't really explain it further, so I would suggest not to get too dogmatic. The answer is, "We don't really know!" We just know that's clearly what God says. Now, at this point we would say, "Hey, that doesn't seem fair! I mean, I don't get that. I wasn't there in the garden; I didn't make that choice. Why would that sin somehow identify me with that sin? Why am I culpable in that sin?" I understand that. We can say, "It's not fair; how does it work? I don't think it should be that way." "Fine. That's a little bit like arguing when someone you deeply love gets diagnosed with cancer." "It's not fair! Why does it have to be that way?" I get that. We can argue that all day long but it doesn't make the cancer go away! In the same way, just because we can't explain it, it doesn't seem fair. How could we in the 21st century possibly be guilty of the sin that Adam committed in the beginning? I don't really know! I just know God says that's the

case. What is the evidence that it's true? He tells you: **death spread to all men**. In other words, the consequence of that is: everybody dies. What is the proof that all sinned in Adam? Answer: everybody dies! That's the proof. So you can argue all day long whether you think it's right or not, or true or not. If you happen to be a person who will not die, you've convinced yourself, "I'll never die!" Then I would say, "God bless you. You probably can argue that the point is not true." But if you understand that you, as a human being, are subject to death and you will die, that is proof positive that the statement is true. We all sinned in Adam and that is the consequence. Death spread to all of us.

You'll notice at the end of verse 12 there is a dash there; — there's a hyphen. Basically the editor is telling you that this *...just as, so then...* argument is going to be interrupted and it's interrupted from verse 13 all the way through verse 17. We don't get to the *so then* until verse 18. So, it's just their way of saying: now we're going to take a little break and talk about something off to the side and then we'll come back to the main point. Paul's argument now—his little side argument—is going to be what I just said: everybody through history has died, and so this is overwhelming evidence that somehow the human race all sinned in Adam—because we all live with the consequence. Verse 13:

**...for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law.**

So what he's saying is: from Adam, who had a clear command, until Moses when the Law was given, in-between that period they did not have specific commands like Adam had and like we have in the Law and certainly like we have today. Were they still sinners? Yes, they were. But, it wasn't imputed; it wasn't credited to their account in the same way. So then, why did they all die? It's the logic of the argument. Verse 14:

**Nevertheless 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.**

So the argument is this: even though between Adam and the Law it was different, they didn't have a clear standard. They didn't disobey the way Adam did and the way they would do after the Law came, but they still all died! Why did they all die? Because they had all sinned in Adam. And sin is a death sentence; everybody lives with that. Everybody dies with that. He says: **of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.**

**Who was to come** is Messianic language. So Adam was a type of the Messiah to come. So what does he mean by **a type**? The best way to understand the idea of *a type* is to realize this Greek word is the exact same word from which we get our word type as in typewriter. You know, old school, you push the typewriter button and it slams the key against a piece of paper and there's an image and the image reflects that key. It's an imprint; it's actually a blacksmithing term. And it means you strike something and it leaves a print, an imprint. And so it's the idea that Adam was an image, an imprint of the coming Messiah. Only they're not very similar; they're very dissimilar, and that's the point of the comparison here.

Now this is really important worldview stuff, because one of the things that informs a person's worldview is whether or not you believe, at the end of the day, human beings are basically good and it's their environment that makes them bad or are they inherently evil and their behavior simply flows out of that nature. If you listen to Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, kind of the new atheists, their big thing is that religion is what makes the world a terrible place. It's what makes people hate each other; it's what causes wars; it's what causes all these problems in the world. If we could do away with God, we could do away with religion. We wouldn't have these problems—

because man inherently is good. The biggest problem they have with their argument is: there was more blood shed in the name of atheism in the 20th century than even remotely close to what was shed in the name of religion. So the argument falters. But, more than that, it leaves us with the conclusion there must be something deeper, something more fundamental that's wrong. If you remember the song by John Lennon of the Beatles fame, you know the song that was *Imagine*. "Imagine there's no heaven; imagine there's no hell; imagine there's no stuff, no materialism, no nations, no borders, no boundaries." I think the song was very well intended. He looked at a world full of hatred and said, "Isn't there some way we could live differently?" But, it was unbelievably naïve because, at the end of the day, none of that changes the fundamental nature of us as humans. We all sinned in Adam. Because of that we are bound to sin. We have a sin nature; we sin out of that nature. We are dead in terms of our relationship with God. Verse 15:

**But the free gift is not like the transgression...**

This begins the comparison and the language here is very important. The transgression is what Adam did—he disobeyed. Because of his disobedience there was a consequence. It was his wage and the wage was death. And because we all sinned with Adam, the wage of death spread to all of us. But the second Adam—the One who is to come—it isn't a wage; it's a free gift. That makes it dramatically different. As a matter of fact, those words are so important that, in the next three verses, Paul will use the word *free*, *free gift* or *grace* eight times. There's no question that's a huge part of the theology here.

**But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the 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. (vs. 15)**

What he's saying there is: because of Adam and Adam's transgression, there was a wage and that wage was applied to everyone. But the free gift is not like that. The free gift is not more; the free gift is *much* more! It actually abounds in the grace of God. Basically what he's saying is: if Adam was here before the fall, what the second Adam did wasn't to get us back up to where Adam was before the fall, but it's more—it's much more—it abounds more! Why is that? He's going to explain that.

**The gift is not like *that which came through the one who sinned*; for on the one hand the judgment *arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation*, but on the other hand the free gift *arose from many transgressions resulting in justification*. (vs. 16)**

So here's the comparison. The one man, the first Adam, sinned—one transgression that plummeted the human race into sin and death. The consequence of that, the wage of that, was judgment and judgment brings condemnation. But the second Adam is different from that. Rather than one transgression and the wage of that, the second Adam took *all* the transgressions of the world—all of the sins of the world—and placed them on one man. And having paid the debt of that sin, He is able to offer justification freely as a gift. The first Adam—it was a wage. The second Adam—it's a gift. The first Adam brought condemnation; the second Adam brings justification. That it is possible because one man took the transgressions of the world upon Himself, that God would be willing, based on your faith in Jesus, to remove the sin-stained robe that you wear and place on you the very robe of the righteousness of God and to declare you righteous in His presence forever! Verse 17:

**For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.**

Because of the decision Adam made, and the wage of that, and because we all sinned in Adam, the reigning principle is *death*. That's very important to understand! For every person who has not experienced new life in Christ, the reigning principle is death. There's no choice; there's no option; that's the way it is—and that explains much of why the world is the way it is. When the reigning principle is death, I am cut off from a relationship with God. Therefore, now I need to become my own god; I need to find my own security; I need to find my own significance; I need to find my own meaning in life. I decide for myself what's right and wrong. I decide for myself what's true and what's not. I decide to give myself pleasure; I make myself happy; I give myself peace; I do whatever I need to try to find that which is meaningful in life because I am now my own god. That's the only choice I have. But when that doesn't work, then rather than trying to create significance and meaning and purpose, we turn to some way to deal with the pain. So we move into addictions; we move into depression; we move into anxiety; we move into pain and to struggles and all of the junk that goes with that. And pretty soon my life is going down the toilet and I can't stop it. I don't want to live that way but I don't know what to do. It's very important to understand: these people work with you; these people live next door; these people go to school with you; these people may be in your family. It helps to have some compassion, to have some patience. These people aren't getting up in the morning and saying, "I think I'll be really messed up; I think I'm going to ruin my life. I think I want to spend my life in addictions and struggles and pain and suffering!" Nobody wants that but they don't know what to do. There's no way out because the reigning principle is death. That's part of the wage that we've inherited from Adam. That's part of the narrative. But, there's an option and the text tells us there's a way out.

**...for those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift [not a wage, a gift] of righteousness will reign in life** (vs. 17b)

The fundamental change is going from death to life. The reigning principle is no longer death; the reigning principle is life! Can you imagine a more dramatic contrast between death and life? I understand why we live this way when the reigning principle is death, but now that that's no longer true, now that I've been given life, the reigning principle is grace! I've been set free; I don't have to live that way. That changes everything! Why is it *much* more? Why is it *abundantly* more? The answer is this: because what Adam experienced was a wage; it was based on his performance. It was his disobedience that spread to all of us. But what we now have in Christ isn't a wage; it's not based on performance; it's not based on being good enough; it's not based on being really religious. It's based on the finished work of Jesus on the cross! The second Adam took the transgressions of the world upon Himself. He paid the debt. He settled it once for all. Therefore, what I have is not a wage—it's a gift! That God, on the basis of the abundance of His grace, promises to declare you righteous in His presence now and forever—and that will never change! When God looked at Adam before the fall, He saw the righteousness of Adam and that was lost as a wage. But, when God looks at us in Christ, He sees His own righteousness. If Adam was here before the fall, the second Adam doesn't just even it up. It's *much* more! It's *abundantly* more because now it is settled; it is finished. The debt has been paid. You are standing in the righteousness of God now and forever—and that will never change. It is abundantly better than what Adam could have even imagined.

**So then [Now we're finally back.] 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.** (vs. 18)

The two most significant moments in all of human history were: first, the disobedience of the first Adam that plunged the human race into sin and death—which affects everybody's life at the most practical level every single day. The second most significant moment was: when the second Adam, on the basis of obedience, has made a way—by virtue of a free gift—that sinful people could be declared righteous in the presence of God forever!

**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.** (vs. 19)

Now he is not talking here about universalism—somehow, because of Jesus' death, everybody is made righteous. He's been abundantly clear about that. In chapter 3: “*to those who believe*”; in chapter 4: “*to those who believe*”; in chapter 5: “*to those who receive*”. Jesus died for every sin, but one has to believe. One has *to receive* for that forgiveness to be applied or to be activated into one's life.

**The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more...** (vs. 20)

What does he mean? That once the Law came in under Moses, sin increased? Does that mean people sinned more? No, it means that they became more aware of more of their sin. Suddenly there was the revelation of the standard: “Here are the rules; here's what God expects.” And people went from thinking they were a *little* bad to realizing they're *really* bad. But no matter how bad the story got, there was an abundance of grace from God to cover every single sin. Nobody in this room has the ability to out-sin the abundance of the grace of God. No matter what you've done, no matter what's been done to you, no one has crossed that line where you're just too bad for God. No such line exists! God's grace is abundant; it's adequate to forgive every sin! Verse 21:

**...so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

The result of the sin of the first Adam, as we all sinned with him, was to plunge the human race into sin—where the reigning principle of life was sin and sin brings forth death. I had no choice but to live out of that, to live out of the bondage of that. I had no chance of freedom; I had no chance to rise above that. That was the consequence; that was the wage and it was a consequence to every single one of us—no exceptions! But, because of the obedience of the second Adam, the reigning principle in life now can be grace, can be freedom, can be righteousness, can be justification, can be declared right in the presence of God—which brings life—that is only possible through Jesus Christ! The difference between death and life, between sin and grace, is as dramatic as it could possibly be. I understand why people who live in the sin of Adam—where sin and death reign in their lives—I understand why they live the way they live. I understand why they make the choices they make. I understand their hopelessness. I understand their despair. I understand their struggles. What I don't understand is: why—once we've been radically changed and the reigning principle is no longer death; it's no longer sin; we've been released; we've been set free—why would we choose to continue to live that way? When God has offered so much more!

I mentioned a few weeks ago I have a lot of friends that are in the *recovery movement*. These are people I love; these are people I respect; these are people I think are very courageous. But I also know those people that have found freedom would be the first ones to tell you that, ultimately, the freedom can only be found in a living relationship with Jesus Christ. He's the only one that ultimately sets you free. It breaks my heart when I hear people in the recovery movement say, "I

will struggle with this for the rest of my life." I think, "Why?" Why would you say that? Why do you think it has to be that way? Why is there one area of life that is somehow not under the power and the victory of Jesus Christ? Why do you think you have to struggle your whole life? As long as you think that way, you will! As long as you think this addiction, this habit, this struggle, this despair, this hopelessness, this depression, this stuff will always be part of my story, I guarantee you: it will be part of your story. But why would you think that there's one area of your life that is somehow more powerful than the power of Jesus? Why would you not believe that you've gone from a reigning principle of death to a principle of life—from bondage of sin to the freedom of grace? Why would you choose to live that way when God offers you so much more? It's a matter of choosing to believe what is true. The enemy whispers in your ear and lies to you and says, "You will struggle the rest of your life." That is a lie! What God offers you is: you have been set free! You've been released from the reigning principle of sin. You can rise above it through the power of Jesus and experience the freedom that God wants from you! There is not a single person in this room that needs to struggle through their life with an addiction to alcohol or to drugs or to pornography or despair or to hopelessness or all these struggles that define life. Nobody needs to—because the power of Jesus is greater, if we choose to believe that!

For some of you in this room this morning: if you have the courage to believe that God tells you the truth when He says you are radically and fundamentally changed, for those of you who have the courage to believe that, for some of you it will be the first time in your Christian life where you have really experienced the words of Jesus when Jesus says, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."

*Father, we're thankful that You tell the truth. Lord, the enemy is a big liar and I know he lies to all of us. There are many in this room this morning who believe those lies. They struggle their way along failing to understand what has radically and fundamentally changed. Lord, give us the courage to believe; give us the courage to believe that You tell the truth, that we might believe and live the truth which will set us free to experience the abundant life that Jesus promised. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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# **The Gospel Story: Through Christ**

*A Study of Romans*

**Romans 5:12-21**

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## **Opening Discussion**

1. What would you identify as the two most significant moments in history? Why? How do these moments affect your life on a daily basis?
2. Why do you think so many Christians would say they struggle rather than flourish in their Christian life?
3. Do you believe everyone ultimately lives their belief system? Why or why not? If people ultimately live their belief system what do our lives say about what we believe?

## **Bible Study**

1. Do a quick review of Romans 5:1-11. What are the top 5 truths you learned from that text?
2. Read Romans 5:12-14. Paul makes the argument that somehow through Adam's sin we all sinned. While we may argue whether this is fair or unfair, but according to Paul, what is the evidence that this is true?
3. How does this text affect our worldview? Are we as humans inherently good or sinful?
4. The – at the end of 5:12 indicates a break in Paul's argument ("just as... so then") to further explain his "just as" statement. What is he trying to clarify or explain in 5:13-14?
5. Read Romans 5:15-17. In what way is the free gift different than Adam's transgression? Why is it "much more" and what makes it "abound"?
6. How does the phrase "those who receive" line up with 4:5, 3:22 and dismiss the idea that all people are "saved" (Universalism)?

7. Read 5:18-21. The “so then” is finally completing the argument from 5:12 (just as). What is Paul’s conclusion? What is the comparison between the first Adam and Christ (the second Adam)?

## **Application**

1. Every person born is born “in Adam” and all that goes with that. This explains why people live the way they live and struggle the way they struggle. It’s not just the environment or social issues but a fundamental core issue that defines every person. How radical is the change “in Christ”? What fundamentally has changed for those who are in Christ? How fundamentally different is reigning in death versus reigning in life? In other words, how different is a dead person from a live person?
2. If we truly believe what Paul says is true, how should we live? What does this say about us if we don’t live according to this truth? Is there any reason for those who are now “in Christ” to live like they did before Christ? Is there anything in our lives that is too hard for God or beyond His power? Should our lives as believers be a little different or a lot different? Is it?