



“Super-Abounding Grace”¹ **Romans 5:12-21**

Years ago, I had a kidney stone. I remember it vividly. Friday night, it hit. Then Saturday, the pain came back a couple times, but I could still function. Then came Sunday. I'm standing in the worship service, but the pain was increasing. I decided to find a Sunday School classroom that wasn't in use. I laid on the floor and decided that since people have said this is a similar pain to pregnancy that breathing calmly light help. The pain increased, but I felt I couldn't leave. There was a new member class at the church, and I was supposed to introduce myself. So, I went to the class, introduced myself, and then I promptly got in the car and was taken to Holland Hospital. When I was being tested, they evaluated my blood pressure. It was noticeably high, and they said something like, "Oh wow, you're definitely in pain!" My thought was something like, "You think so?!" Then I got to the room, and they gave me some medicine. Almost immediately the pain was gone. But it wasn't because the kidney stone had passed. It was because the medicine was only supposed to deceive my brain into thinking there was no pain.

After a while, the medication wore off and the pain came right back. And, it took a few more hours until finally, the issue resolved. And then, no more pain! I'll tell you what, pain can give you a greater appreciation of no pain, can't it? I remember when my wife was in labor with our firstborn. She had an epidural, and after receiving it, she was so relieved that she said "I love you" to the anesthesiologist.

I share both of these stories to emphasize a specific point. We come to appreciate glorious things by seeing them in contrast with the bad and painful. This is actually what we're going to see in Romans 5. Ben preached a glorious text talking about how Jesus gives us peace with God. But we can be tempted to gloss over these realities and say something like, "Well, I already know that. No big deal." If you think that, you're forgetting the pain, the hardship, the horrors of what humanity deserves. And, as a result, you're not seeing truly what Jesus gives. So, Paul moves further into chapter 5 to show us just how horrible the situation is apart from Jesus, and then shows us how glorious the situation is in Jesus!

Let's now move into the text. Turn in your Bibles to Romans 5, and after I pray for us, we will read verses 12-21 together:

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— ¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹ This manuscript is still in the rough draft phase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. ²

As we read through this text today, you could have been thinking, "Why so long of a text? That's so confusing?!" First off, let me say that I completely agree with why you're feeling that way. These are 9 long and complex verses. I even debated over whether or not I should break this text up into two or three weeks, but here's why I didn't. Paul connects them all together under one big point. In fact, if you look at verse 12, he starts off with a statement and then doesn't finish it! And, he doesn't pick up on it until verse 18. And then verse 18 connects with the following verse. So, I didn't feel as though I should break this up. That said, there's a lot of glorious statements to ponder here. I encourage you to study more in the weeks to come! I assure you I'm not going to get all the nuances. Eternity won't be long enough! But, I love what one man named John Stott said of these verses, ". . .most have . . . admired its craftsmanship. It may be likened to a well-chiselled carving or a carefully constructed musical composition" (as quot. in Keller, p. 123).

Having said this, the premise of this text is that **In Adam, there is condemnation, but in Jesus, there is super-abounding grace.** Paul highlights the bad news, and then he moves into the good news. It's not just that Jesus takes away the pain. But instead, Jesus gives far greater than what our minds can conceive. You see Paul's desire to help us get the point of Jesus' greatness when you look at the words he piles up in these verses. Words like "free gift," "grace," "abundance of grace," and "grace abounded." Paul's words cannot reach the glories of what God gives us through Jesus! But even though he cannot fully express, he'll try. And as I read these words, they excite me. And I hope they do to you as well.

So, in starting this sermon, we have to focus on the bad news that Paul brings up. And the bad news is *really* bad, not only for one person, but for all humanity.

1. In Adam, there is only bad news (vv. 12-14).

Read verses 12-14 again with me: ¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— ¹³for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death reigned from Adam

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 5:12–21.

to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.³

He starts off with the word “Therefore” again, and that means Paul is picking up off of what he has just said. Those who trust Jesus have *peace* with God! We are secure with him, loved by him. We are his! And now, Paul says “Therefore.” This “Therefore” is, I believe, intended to show us Paul’s defense for *how* we can be at peace with God. How can we possibly be that secure with God on the basis of Jesus.

So, Paul goes on, but he doesn’t talk first about Jesus. Instead, he goes to Adam. He does this to help us to see how God has worked with humanity. He shows us that all humanity is defined as either being *in Adam* or *in Christ*. In contrasting Adam with Jesus, we see how God can (and has) gloriously bring peace to those who turn from their sinfulness and trust Jesus.

Verse 12 goes on, and then it kind of stops. Paul puts the premise right at the beginning, but in order to prove the premise, he has to talk about other things. So, he stops mid-sentence, and won’t bring up the rest until verse 18. But the beginning portion has to be commented on. The idea Paul is bringing out is that sin came into the world through one man. The one man is Adam. By the way, the statement here is the reason why in our church’s doctrinal statement, we say that we believe in a historical Adam. Genesis doesn’t bring up the name Adam to simply be allegorical. Paul speaks of him as a real human being who really affected real people. And, the real people he affected is the entire human race.

This means Paul is saying Adam has affected all his readers. Adam has affected all of us sitting here in this room today. What affects Adam affects us. We should want to pay careful attention. How has Adam affected the entire human race? Sin came into the world *through* Adam. And death has entered because of sin. We read this in Genesis. God gives the command to not eat the fruit. Adam does. He sins. The consequence was that in that day, Adam would surely die. And this death includes spiritual and physical death. The day Adam ate, he was separated from God. But then, Adam was on a trajectory to physical death as well.

Now, Paul says, Adam’s sin didn’t just affect Adam. The end of verse 12 says, “so death spread to all men because all sinned. . . .”⁴ This is a very intriguing phraseology here. Paul doesn’t say that sin spread to all men. Instead, there’s imagery I think Paul wants us to picture. Think of a door. On the other side of the door is death. The name of the door is sin. Open sin and what enters the room? Death. This is a faint picture of what Paul is saying here. Adam didn’t merely let sin in. Instead, through opening up sin, death entered into this realm. And, death actually took over humanity. Now, human beings live in the realm of death.

But then Paul says “because all have sinned.” There are two ways to take this phrase. One could be to say that Adam brought death into this world, and now all humans are born spiritually dead and therefore sin. So, Paul not only says that death leads to sin. But he’s also saying that sin leads to death. We’re in a cycle of death and sin. This view is plausible, but I think it ignores the past tense. Now, I know in the Greek that the past tense doesn’t always have to be taken as a past tense, but I think it’s notable here.

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 5:12–14.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 5:12.

One man named William Barclay comments on these words, saying, **“If we are to give the aorist tense its full value [here], and in this argument we must do so, the more precise meaning will be that sin and death entered into the world because all men were guilty of one act of sin”** (Barclay as quot. in Keller, p. 125).

Get what Paul’s saying here. Not only do we enter the realm of death because of Adam, but we are also sinners because of Adam’s sin. We don’t merely sin. We are sinful. I know some might be thinking “Not fair!” at this point. But before I try to explain this a little more, let’s listen to *why* Paul is stating this. He stops his thought in verse 12, and then moves into verses 13-14, which say, ¹³“for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.”⁵

In verse 13, he says “for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given.” We shouldn’t gloss over this statement simply because it sounds obvious. Of course sin was in the world before the Law! But, why does Paul state the obvious like this? Maybe because people weren’t thinking about sin rightly. It seems Paul is confronting people who thought that sin was simply breaking the Mosaic Law. By the way, this is in some ways how people think today. We know the phrase “ignorance is bliss,” right? We think that if we don’t know, then we’re not culpable. There are people who have taught that people in other countries who don’t know the Bible cannot possibly be held accountable for their sinfulness.

But here, Paul says that Adam brings us horrible news for the human race. Sin was in the world before the Law was given. Think back to the times after Adam. Was there sin? But right here someone might say, “But what does Paul mean when he says “but sin is not counted where there is no law?” Does this mean that God didn’t punish sins from Adam to Moses? Absolutely not! I’m thinking of a man named Noah and an Ark. Mosaic Law didn’t exist, but there was punishment.

What does Paul mean then? I believe he’s saying that sin first and foremost is *counted to us* because of the representative who sinned in our place. We are declared sinful (and are sinful in heart and practice) because of Adam’s willful sin against God. So, without a stated Law, the sins taking place after Adam was not like the sin of Adam. But, the actions were still sinful. They may not know that they’re actually sinning against God. But when there was a written Law, then people were even more responsible. There’s greater guilt. But there was still sin. And that’s why Paul goes on and says, “Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who sinning was not like the transgression of Adam. . .” Even though the guilt wasn’t as great. Even though people didn’t sin like Adam. Meaning, even though they didn’t have an explicit command coming at them from God, death still reigned? Why? Because they’re living in the realm of Adam. And they are sinners. When you hear this, you realize that ignorance isn’t bliss. **Ignorance coddles human’s condemnation.**

But you may still be thinking, “But hold on a second. I don’t think it’s fair that I’m a sinner because of Adam’s sin and that I’m living in the realm of death because of Adam’s actions!” This can’t possibly be what Paul is saying. First, let me affirm this is what Paul is saying by quoting Paul elsewhere. In 1 Corinthians 15:22, Paul writes, ²²“For as in Adam all die. . .”⁶

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 5:13–14.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), 1 Co 15:22.

So, you have to admit that this is exactly what Paul means. Now, you can think, “But how is this fair?” I think this question comes to us more in Western culture where we highly prize individualistic freedoms. We believe we alone are the masters of our own fate, and we reject notions of community that eastern people readily embrace.

What Paul is teaching here is consistent with the Scriptures in saying that God created humans not only individually, but as a community. We live in solidarity with the human race. So, even think when God created Adam and Eve. He said he was going to create man in his image, and then he created two. Humanity reveals the image of God. And God created us to need one another. But in creating Adam, God made Adam the representative of the entire human race. This is what has been referred to in the past as Federal Headship. The word “federal” means “covenant.” Adam was in a special covenant relationship with God. And, as the “head,” that means he was responsible and the representative of human beings.

At this point, you could say, “But I didn’t vote for Adam! He’s not my representative!” In our republic society, we don’t have people declare over us like this. We vote. Yet, even in our society, we can recognize that we can have people who represent us whom we didn’t chose. And what they decide affects us. Think of our country going to war, for example. Our government doesn’t ask for a vote for warfare. What if we disagree? They can still go to war, and that war will affect all of us. Because we’re citizens of the same country, it’s legitimately said that “we are at war” with the other country.

What rubs us the wrong way in all of this is that we don’t like it that we didn’t have a choice of our representative. Or, we would have rather had a chance to prove ourselves instead of being judged by Adam. Both of these responses miss very important truths. First, when we think we should have the choice at our representative, we’re saying that we think we could have found a better one than the one God created?! God not only chose Adam, but he created Adam. And that brings up the second point. God created Adam as the perfect representative. One commentator said this: “He was perfectly created and designed to act exactly as you, personally, as an individual, would have acted in the same situation” (Keller, p. 128).

Adam’s sin brought death. All humans are born in the realm of death. And now humans don’t simply sin. They are sinners who sin. If we don’t like that message, that simply indicates how bad the news is *in Adam*. His representativeness reveals humanity’s sinfulness. It also reveals our awful situation. We are bound in our sins. But the news doesn’t stop there. God planned before time began to have greater news than what Adam could bring. And so, at the end of verse 14, Paul says, “who was a type of the one who was to come.”⁷ God created Adam as the representative of humanity. But God didn’t just create Adam as the only representative. There’s another one, a greater one. There’s another federal head. Another one who was in covenant relationship with the Father. Adam’s representation led to death, but this other one, Jesus Christ, brings peace with God!

There could be another representative for us. And in this one, there could be very good news! And that’s what we see in verses 15-18.

2. In Christ, there is greater news than in Adam (vv. 15-19).

⁷ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 5:14.

In verses 15-19, we see two ways that Jesus' representation is far superior to Adam's. The first is given in verse 15, and the second in verse 16. Then Paul restates his point and is basically asking, "What's greater, being in Adam or in Christ?"

So, let's look at the first reason why being in Christ is greater than being in Adam:

Being in Adam brings death. Being in Christ brings abounding grace.

Verse 15 says, "¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many."⁸

I love how one commentator comments on these verses and wrote, "Adam and Christ are analogous in that the status of all human beings depends on the work of Adam or of Christ" (Schreiner, p. 284). You either have Adam as your representative or Jesus as your covenant head. In verse 15, Paul is quick to say that Jesus is like Adam in that he's a representative, but from there, we have to see not how Adam and Jesus compare, but how they contrast.

Jesus brings a free gift, which Paul will bring up in a moment. But, in order to really appreciate the free gift. Look at the pain. Look at the darkness of what Adam did brought. Many died through *one* man's trespass. Adam deliberately, knowledgeably rebelled against the Creator. That's what the word "trespass" indicates. He knew the standard and he went against it. As a result, many died. The word "many" feels like an understatement, but I think it's also pointed. How many have died because of Adam's sin? Recently, I picked up another biography of a 19th century missionary named John Paton. Within the first 80 pages, I've read of multiple deaths. Two of them were of his wife and newborn child. In reading the account of her death and John's sorrow, I couldn't help but tear up. Those are *two* people who I don't even know. But what about the death's in Laos that are happening right now because of the water. What about the deaths of babies through abortion? What about the car accidents and deaths? What about the sicknesses that lead to death? The earth currently has about 7.6 billion people on it. *Every single person* will die. And every individual in the past has died. And this death came because of Adam's representation. A representation that represented us perfectly. His sin is ours. And his consequence is ours as well.

"But the free gift is not like the trespass." Then the end of verse 15 says, "much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many."⁹ Again, Paul is heaping up encouraging words one-on-another. He doesn't just say "gift," he says "free gift." Then he doesn't simply say, "more," but "much more." Then he doesn't only say "grace," but then says "the free gift by the grace." And then he doesn't simply say that this free gift comes to us. But he says that it "abounded for many!"

When I read this, one of my questions was, "What is the free gift?" And actually, Paul answers this in verse 17. It's the free gift of righteousness in conjunction with life. We are set free to live in the realm of life instead of death. In Christ, humans are set free to live as we were intended to live. We were created to know, love and worship the Creator God. Death is separation from God's kindnesses. Life is being reconciled to God and loving him! This is the free gift Jesus brings!

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 5:15.

⁹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 5:15.

In Adam, the result is condemnation. In Christ, there is justification (v. 16).

Verse 16 says, “¹⁶And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.”¹⁰

What’s the result of Adam’s sin? Adam brings condemnation. The Bible says that after physical death comes the judgment. And, all who are *in Adam* are condemned. Jesus speaks of this condemnation as being separated from God in a place called Hades. And then, Revelation says that death and Hades are cast into the Lake of Fire, which is Hell. Rejecting God is death. Living in Adam is living in eternal death. But the free gift Jesus gives brings justification.

And, Paul shows us here that Jesus’ grace is even greater than Adam’s sin because Adam made a mess, but Jesus not only cleaned the mess, but gives greater glory. We all know how easy it is to make a mess, right? I have five kids. Making a mess is easy. But cleaning up? It’s exhausting. On a much grander scale, Jesus looked at this world filled with sinfulness, in the realm of death, and he came into it. He undid the sin, and then he gives grace upon grace upon grace. His grace now shines all the more brightly in contrast to the great sinfulness of the human race.

Now, let me comment quickly on this term “free gift.” What is this free gift? Verse 17 says that it’s the gift of righteousness. Which, I think first speaks to Jesus’ own righteousness given to us. And in being *in Christ*, we are brought to life. And because of Jesus, we are declared righteous. Just as we are counted sinners in Adam, we are counted righteous in Jesus. This gift is a gift. It’s given to us apart from our works. It’s free. And it has more powerful effects than what Adam brought into the world. It’s much more precious. It’s something we can rest in, rejoice in, celebrate!

Ventura, do you celebrate this? Listen, this one man, Jesus Christ, is the One who suffered the punishment sinners deserved. In coming to this earth, he was the second Adam. And, in order to rescue people in the realm of death, he obeyed perfectly. Then he took the punishment of not only Adam but of sinners (plural). In taking the punishment of physical death and also the punishment of God’s wrath on himself, and then in raising from the dead. He conquered death and sin! Now, God calls all men and women everywhere to turn to Jesus for forgiveness and peace with God. And for all who believe, God gifts us with Jesus’ righteousness. We’re no longer in Adam. We are *in Christ!* Jesus now defines us.

And, listen intently, believer. This should astound you daily. You’re at peace with God. You’ve been given an utterly free gift. That means that you can’t do anything to maintain this gift either! There’s nothing you can do to take the gift away. There’s nothing you can do to add to this marvelous, free, abounding grace! So, we see here that Adam brings death, but Jesus brings abounding grace. Now Paul gives one more point in verse 17:

In Adam, death reigns. In Christ, humans reign.

Verse 17 says, “For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.”¹¹

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 5:16.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 5:17.

God created humans to rule under his rulership. But when Adam sin, death took the reigns. But in Christ, Paul says that Jesus takes those reigns from death, and then gives an abundance of grace and righteousness in the new realm of life found in him. Through Jesus Christ, we can now reign. We can now live out the kingdom principles of God. And someday, we will live in a New Heaven and New Earth where we will obey him forever and ever!

So, at this point, you could say, “How do I get *in Christ*?” Well, this verse says that to those who receive, they are placed in Christ. This fits what Paul has been saying previously in Romans. We are rescued by Jesus through *faith* in him. And, faith isn’t just believing some information. Faith means that you are depending on Jesus to be your life, your righteousness, your satisfaction. You turn from trusting yourself, your actions and good works. And you turn to Jesus for forgiveness for your sinfulness and need for him to cleanse you and make you right with God. Those who receive him, are rescued. We are given abundant grace – not only to be forgiven, but grace to reign!

Now, read verses 18-19 with me: ¹⁸Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.¹²

Sin through Adam led to condemnation for all men. One act of righteousness leads to justification and life. The one act of righteousness takes us back to Romans 3, where Paul highlights Jesus’ death as the act of righteousness. Jesus taking our sin on himself in people’s place. This leads to our being declared righteous, and Jesus took our death so we could have him as our life!

Now, while 18 and 19 are essentially saying the same thing, I think verse 19 presses a little more. When he says “one man’s obedience,” he’s saying that God required perfect obedience. Adam failed his probation in the garden. Jesus passed. Therefore, Jesus not only didn’t sin. He actively obeyed. And now, God looks at all in Christ as being positively righteous! So, one man named J. Gresham Machen once said, **“Adam before he fell was righteous in the sight of God, but he was still under the possibility of becoming unrighteous. Those who have been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ not only are righteous in the sight of God but they are beyond the possibility of becoming unrighteous. In their case, the probation is over ... because Christ has stood it for them”** (as quot. in Keller, p. 133).

At this point, it would seem like Paul should end, but then we have verses 20-21. And they feel almost forced by Paul, but they’re very important. Read them with me: ²⁰Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹³

Paul talked about the law back in verses 12-14. He brings it up again here. Why? Because the Jewish people could say something like, “Then what’s the point of the Law? Surely the Law does some good and helps us in our being justified.” And, Paul says here that one of the purposes of the law was to increase the trespass. In other words, God gave the Law to the Jewish people in order to show how sinful humanity is. The Jews were a picture to the world of what we do when we have God’s Law given to us.

¹² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 5:18–19.

¹³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 5:20–21.

We're just like Adam. We'll not merely sin, but we're sin with obstinacy. Look at Israel's history. The Law didn't save. It revealed sin. It showed rebellion against God. And eventually, the people went into captivity in Babylon. They rejected God. They worshipped idols.

But God also shows through the nation that he doesn't leave people in their sin. He gave the Law to highlight sin, but he wanted to highlight something even more: his grace. "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." Where sin is like Mount Everest, God's grace extends beyond the universe! The word used here for "abounded" really has the idea of "superabounding." Paul is saying you really don't understand grace until you start using superlative phrases! If grace isn't absolutely, completely astounding, fascinating, joy-giving and strengthening; you're missing the complex glory of God's grace!

So, it might seem like sin can hinder and block God's intentions, but Paul says that God's intention was to show how much greater his grace is than all the sins of humanity! And when Jesus' grace comes to people, and people are then placed *in Christ*, they are freed to live in the realm of life. And in living in this realm of life in Christ, they reign in righteousness. And this term for righteousness isn't simply saying that they're declared righteous, but this is saying they're declared righteous, but they also are freed to actually become who God has declared them to be.

So, who is your representative: Adam or Christ? Are you living in the realm of sin and death or righteousness and life? Look to Jesus and rejoice in superabounding grace that is greater than all our accumulated sins and sinfulness!

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