

## Romans: Foundations – “Overflow” (Romans 5:12-21)

*“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 – for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted when there is no law. 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.” Romans 5:12-14*

The first portion of Romans 5:12 is one of the most concise definitions in Scripture regarding the doctrine of the depravity of man. Though Paul spent the first 3 chapters extolling the plight of sinful man, here he gives us the whole in 3 phrases: sin came through Adam, death came through sin, man is dead because all mankind has sinned in Adam. As we have seen in the first 11 verses, unregenerate man is helpless, ungodly, a sinner, and an enemy of God. And the origin of this state is found in Genesis 3. But before Paul pulls the last nail out of our coffin and puts the finishing touches of God’s grace to our account, he has one more objection to address...

The argument is this: It’s a given that man dies when he disobeys God’s law, but there was no Law from Adam to Moses, yet men died. Adam died because he violated God’s command, but everyone following him didn’t have that law to disobey. So death must have another origin. The cause is Adam’s sin. We are born “in Adam” and “the sin” – the enslaving, ruling, indwelling principle of sin – is at work in us. Therefore we are condemned because of our identification with Adam in his sin, not for each individual act of sin that comes from that source. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are innately sinners.

In verse 12, death spread to (Gr. *dierchomai* or *root dielthen*) or “passed or went through” all men. “*Eisēlthen*, “entered into” (the first clause in the verse) means that sin went in the world’s front door (by means of Adam’s sin); and *diēlthen*, “went through,” means that death penetrated the entire human race, like a vapor permeating all of a house’s rooms. The reason death spread to all, Paul explained, is that all sinned. The Greek past (aorist) tense occurs in all three verbs in this verse. So the entire human race is viewed as having sinned in the one act of Adam’s sin (cf. “all have sinned,” also the Gr. past tense, in [3:23](#)). Two ways of explaining this participation of the human race in the sin of Adam have been presented by theologians—the “federal headship” of Adam over the race and the “natural or seminal headship” of Adam... [The federal headship view considers Adam, the first man, as the *representative* of the human race that generated from him. As the representative of all humans, Adam’s act of sin was considered by God to be the act of all people and his penalty of death was judicially made the penalty of everybody. The natural headship view, on the other hand, recognizes that the entire human race was *seminally* and *physically* in Adam, the first man. As a result God considered all people as participating in the act of sin which Adam committed and as receiving the penalty he received.”<sup>1</sup>

*“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. 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. 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.” Romans 5:15-17*

Finally, the remedy arrives in verse 15 and we see the contrast between Adam and the trespass and Christ and the free gift. An analogy is stated in verse 14 that Adam is a “type of Him who is to come”, but Adam and Christ are only analogous to the extent of being representative heads. Rather the contrasts are emphasized. The trespass (Gr. *paraptōma* – *a deviation from the path, a false step*) by the one man Adam brought about the death of all mankind. Judgment (Gr. *krima*) or in legal terms, the sentence, that resulted from Adam’s sin brought condemnation (Gr. *katakrima*) or the full weight of judgment – death. As a result death reigned in all humankind. But Paul wants us to know that God is not making an even exchange in His offer of salvation. No, the ruin in Adam is thorough, but the life in Christ is much more. John Calvin said, “If Adam’s fall had the effect of producing the ruin of many, the grace of God is much more efficacious in benefiting many since Christ is much more powerful to save than Adam was to ruin.”

The “free gift” (Gr. *charisma*) or gift of grace is identified in verse 17 as righteousness. This gift abounds to all those that believe in Christ. It brings justification and life. “The condemnation by Adam was for *one sin*; but

<sup>1</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (V 2). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

the justification by Christ is an absolution not only from the guilt of that first offense, mysteriously attaching to every individual of the race, but from the *countless offenses* it, to which, as a germ lodged in the bosom of every child of Adam, it unfolds itself in his life.” This is the meaning of “*grace abounding towards us in the abundance of the gift of righteousness.*” It is a grace not only rich in its *character*, but rich in *detail*; it is a “righteousness” not only rich in a *complete justification* of the guilty, condemned sinner; but rich in the *amplitude of the ground* which it covers, leaving no one sin of any of the justified uncanceled, but making him, though loaded with the guilt of myriads of offenses, “the righteousness of God in Christ.”<sup>2</sup> Amazingly, we are not just forgiven of our sin as though the gift of grace was just enough. We are reborn. We are declared righteous. And by the Spirit, we are set free from the daily bondage of sin. God’s grace overflows to our need and then abounds all the more for our joy and victory.

*“Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 5:18-21*

Finishing up verses 13-17, it is as if Paul put a parenthesis around them. And now he comes back to his original analogy in verse 12 to finish it. Verse 12 – as by one man sin came and by it death...and then in verse 18 – so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life. Adam’s disobedience (Gr. *parakōē* – literally to hear amiss, with the notion of active disobedience which follows this inattentive or careless hearing) made sinners of us all. Christ’s obedience (Gr. *hupakoe* – to listen to something, hearken) makes the many (believing) righteous.

### Adam’s Headship:

One trespass  
Sin entered into the world  
All die  
All have sinned  
Judgment and condemnation  
One man disobeyed  
All made sinners  
Sin reigned in death  
Man is helpless  
Man is ungodly  
Man is a sinner  
Man is an enemy of God

### Jesus’ Headship:

One free gift  
Grace abounds to the many  
Many live  
Christ dies for sinners  
Justification, life and hope  
One man (Jesus) obeyed  
Many made righteous  
Grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life  
Man exults in tribulations  
Man exults in the hope of the glory of God  
Man has access into grace  
Man has peace with God / is reconciled with God  
Man has love poured into his heart by the Holy Spirit  
Man rejoices in God  
Man is saved by Jesus’ life

John Piper has a fitting discourse for the end of Romans 5:

“So we have seen two things that need a remedy. One is our sinful nature that enslaves us to sin, and the other is our original guilt and condemnation that is rooted not first in our individual sinning but in our connection with Adam in his sin. The book of Romans – indeed the whole Bible is the story of how God has worked in history to remedy these two problems. The problem of our condemnation in Adam God remedies through justification in Christ. The problem of our corruption and depravity he remedies through sanctification by the Spirit. Or to put it another way: The problem of our legal guilt and condemnation before God is solved by his reckoning to us the righteousness [of] Christ; and the problem of our moral defilement and habitual sinning is solved by his purifying us by the work of [the] Spirit. The first remedy, justification, comes by imputed righteousness. The other, sanctification, comes by imparted righteousness. Justification is instantaneous; sanctification is progressive...They are not identical, and they are not separable. Justification comes first by faith prior to any deeds done by us in righteousness. By this we are forgiven and put right with God legally. We are acquitted and counted righteous with Christ’s righteousness. Then on the basis of this secure and reconciled standing with God, we are gradually transformed

<sup>2</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Ro 5:16). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

into the likeness of his Son by the Spirit. Justification and sanctification are inseparable because both are by faith. The faith that unites us to Christ for justification also breaks the power of sin in our lives. Woe to us if we try to get right with God by faith alone, and then try to become good people by some other means. Trusting Christ for all that God is for us in him is the link to God's justifying grace, and trusting Christ for all that God is for us in him is the link to God's sanctifying grace. We are pardoned and we are purified – by the same kind of faith.”

“In evil long I took delight  
Unawed by shame or fear,  
Till a new object met my sight,  
And stopped my wild career.  
“I saw One hanging on a tree,  
In agonies and blood;  
Who fixed His languid eyes on me,  
As near His cross I stood.  
“Sure, never till my latest breath,  
Can I forget that look;  
It seemed to charge me with His death,  
Though not a word He spoke.  
“My conscience felt and owned the guilt,  
And plunged me in despair,  
I saw my sins His blood had spilt,  
And helped to nail Him there.  
“Alas, I knew not what I did,  
But all my tears were vain;  
Where could my trembling soul be hid,  
For I the Lord had slain!  
“A second look He gave, that said,  
‘I freely all forgive!  
This blood is for thy ransom paid,  
I died that thou mayest live.’”

John Newton