

Romans 5:12-21: Abounding Grace

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 July 2007

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] At this time, children ages 2 and under can be dismissed to the nursery, and ages 3 through 5th grade can be dismissed out this way to Kid City. This morning's scripture is found in Romans 5, verses 12 through 21, and you can find that on page 807 of the Pew Bibles provided.

Romans 5, starting verse 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.

For sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where 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 the type of the one who was to come.

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.

[1 : 16] 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.

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 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, for some of you, I imagine that Romans is beginning to feel like a difficult reading assignment given in school.

Perhaps you've already found yourself turning ahead, counting the number of pages that remain before this kind of sustained discourse will finally break at chapter 12.

[2 : 45] And I'm with you this morning. It's easy to be weary of the mental stamina required to stick with Paul's way of writing.

So, for the discouraged among us, a helpful introduction from Peter on Paul. It must be acknowledged that by the time 2 Peter was written, Paul's letter to the Romans had not only been written, but delivered and read by the house churches in Rome.

But beyond that, it must have been copied, distributed and studied by a wider group of readers across the Mediterranean Rim. And Peter, having read Romans for himself and having looked at the glaze on people's faces who tried to do the same, presents a humorous, if not backhanded compliment to this kind of Aristotelian style of logic and argumentation that goes from Romans 1.18 all the way through chapter 11.

This is what Peter writes. Chapter 2, 3, 15, and 16. Our beloved brother Paul also wrote you concerning the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks of these matters.

Here's the line. Isn't that great? That's Peter on Paul. And so you're in good company this morning if you're the kind of person who's finding Romans right at about this juncture difficult.

[4 : 26] I mean, let me tell you the kind of company you're in. You're in God's company. Even God saw fit to make it a point to tell us Paul is tough.

So what do you do with that? As an encouragement, I want you to see now that we're in chapter 5 and we've got to stay with him through 11, that this is God's word.

And that God wants you to go to work with your mind. Remember, in chapter 1, we had a mind that wanted to go its own way outside of the character of God.

And in chapter 12, when you're going to get to the implication of the gospel argument, the first thing that happens is a transformation via the renewing of your mind.

So if you're exploring Bible reading for the first time in your life, or you're now reading Romans for the first time in your life, or listening to a series of sermons that take you through this argument, know that this work is the work God's given you to do.

[5 : 42] Now, knowing why something can be difficult is often the first step in moving beyond the difficulty to how it is there to help you and to appreciate its contribution.

So ask yourself, why is reading Romans hard? Two things I just want to mention. One, it forces us to stay with a very sophisticated argument on the subject of salvation.

All right? That's just it. Acknowledge it. This is sophisticated argumentation. Two, Paul's writing style is often complicated.

This is not like reading the newspaper. Although we find his style difficult, you might not always be sure why.

Why is Paul hard for me to read? Well, today's text, open it because it's really going to be necessary to look at it. Romans 5, 12-21 gives you a perfect example of Paul's writing style and why he's difficult to follow.

[6 : 58] The hidden problem in his writing style is with the grammar of the very first half of the opening verse. Verse 12. Take a look. Everything before that first comma is written in a way where it's begging for a comparison to be made after the comma.

But the comparison never comes. Do you see that phrase? It says, therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man.

That just as sets your mind up, whether you're conscious of it or not, for something to follow like so also. Just as, and in comparison, so also.

But Paul doesn't do that. His English teacher, his writing teacher in high school would have had a heyday with him. Instead, he breaks off that opening thought, never finishes that sentence, leaves it hanging there, and he begins to elaborate on something that captured his mind in that opening phrase instead.

Now, if his writing style was easy to follow, he would have written something like this. Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, so also, through one man, many will be made righteous.

[8 : 26] That's something he actually says in verse 19. He almost completes the cycle of his thought at the close of our text.

But what do we get instead? Here's what we get, and Aaron read it very well, but here's what we get. Listen to how easy it is for your mind to go off on Paul, to check out, to be gone, long before the sermon ever begins.

Here's what we get. 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 indeed sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law, yet death, you know, reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one to come.

You're gone. Most of us have checked out. The only hope in the original paragraph for most readers today is that last little word, type.

Because when we see the word type, we're like, oh, okay, we're going to hear something about a comparison. Because a type of something is something that's similar to something. So even if we lost the whole first paragraph, our mind is quickened by that last word, type, and we're thinking again that what's going to follow will give me a comparison.

[9 : 53] But what does he do in 15 to 17? He doesn't do it again. Instead of giving you a comparison on how these types are similar, he launches into how they're really an anti-type, how they're different.

Because as soon as he says, now let me talk about something that's similar, but, verse 15, the free gift is not like the trespass. And so you're gone again. You come to the last paragraph, the third of our three-point sermon today, and finally you get relief.

Let me take a look. Therefore, as, or just as, one trespass led to condemnation for all men, oh, Paul, please, complete your thought.

Give me something that corresponds by way of comparison. And he does. So, one act of righteousness leads to justification for life of all men.

And he doesn't just give it to you once, having hung you out to dry the first time, having hung you out to dry the second time, the third time is the charm, and it's the charm in spades, because that last paragraph, he does the same thing three times.

[11 : 08] Verse 18, As one trespass, so one act of righteousness. Verse 19, For just as by one man's disobedience, after the comma, so by the one man's obedience.

Verse 21, As sin reigned in death, so grace might reign through life and righteousness. That's Paul.

That's vintage Paul. And if you don't figure that out, then you're going to have difficulty riding his wave and his style.

So, having seen it, having recognized that he's difficult, having understood what he's doing here, that he is going to make this paragraph, this whole sermon, is going to be something about a comparison between the one man at the beginning of history and the one man Jesus Christ, and the overarching point is going to be about this triumphant grace that the second one has, that the first one can't bring, you're ready to receive his word.

The three paragraphs in our text are like this. The first one, 12 to 14, he wants you to know of your solidarity with Adam.

[12 : 32] The second two paragraphs, he wants to speak of the superiority of Christ. And in the second and third paragraphs, he does so first in 15 to 17 by way of contrasting the two men, then in verses 18 to 21 by way of comparing the two men.

That's what's before you this morning. Your solidarity with Adam. Christ's superiority to Adam.

First by way of contrast, then by way of comparison, and the overarching thing that ought to just be pouring into your soul is the super abounding grace of God that has come to you even though you are of the race of Adam.

And the one who makes all the difference for you, it's Jesus. So let's take a look in just a few moments, settling our mind now on this first paragraph, our solidarity with Adam.

He opens, 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.

[14 : 04] Verse 12, the sin which entered into the world through one man extended to all mankind because all mankind sins.

sins. You know, the closest thing we have outside the Bible of this really strong connection on the responsibility for sin entering into the world falling to the first man Adam is in 4th Ezra.

4th Ezra, there's a moment where that source reads, O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone but ours also who are your descendants.

That's about as close as what Paul is trying to say here. That the first man sin somehow subsumes and is accountable for not only sin entering the world but our sharing in it as his children.

it's almost as if you thought of it in terms of DNA. You know, for those who have children of their own, those children bear, they bear the very makeup of their parents.

[15 : 33] And in some mysterious way that we do not know, certainly beyond merely the way we imitate Adam, all of us bear the imprint of a character gone wrong when it comes to how we relate to God.

Now, you need to know that this verse 12 is huge on the landscape of history and interpretation of the Bible.

This is the verse where Augustine in the 4th century interprets it in a way that gives the world ever since the 4th century the doctrine called original sin.

The reason is he had been reacting to a man named Pelagius who had entered the scene and Pelagius in his commentary on Romans begins to bear the thought that there's no connection between Adam's sin and our sin.

And Pelagius in a sense began to develop an idea that all of humanity is born you might say neutral or sinless before God and that in Christ all of humanity could one day be sinless.

[17 : 03] Or perfect if you actually lived according to Christ. Augustine comes along and through this verse interprets it to mean that all of us have sinned in Adam.

Not by imitation but by propagation and that when he sinned because we were of his seed we sinned with him in that act.

Now he does so through that little word because. Do you see it there in verse 12? I actually prefer this translation. It differs a little bit from Augustine. Augustine would have said that death spread to all men in whom that is in that first man in whom we have Adam.

But this actually uses the phrase as a matter of consequence death spreads to all men because everyone sins. So this verse which has often been linked to original sin may not be able to bear the weight of Augustine's argumentation but nevertheless while it might not prove original sin what can we say about our solidarity with Adam?

Here's what Paul is telling you. Number one Paul holds Adam accountable for sin and death coming into the world. that's what he does. Number two Paul holds that all people do sin and that each person is accountable for their own sin.

[18 : 41] Number three Paul says that this universal condition then of humanity means that as a race we are sinners in the sight of God and without hope unless we get his sovereign mercy.

That's what Paul argues. Now think of it today. This really echoes Genesis 1-3 doesn't it? The first man sins the wages of sin was supposed to be death as a consequence of his sin they are forced out of the garden and death comes the dislocation of all our relational difficulties the problems of all of humanity come as a result of this separation between life and death.

Everything we give birth to dies. We die. The world is filled with cemeteries. And yet somehow this is interesting as a pastor many today refuse to see themselves as sinners.

sinners. And I find that that is just as true in the church as it is outside the church. One of the membership questions if you become a member of Holy Trinity the very first one is do you see yourself as sinner in the sight of God without hope save his sovereign mercy?

I can't tell you over the 13 years how many conversations I've had with prospective members with that very notion do you see yourself as a sinner has been a moment of great pause why?

[20 : 30] We don't like to view ourselves in that way we don't naturally think that we are out of sorts with God and if we've trusted Christ we don't like to think that that's who we were without his mercy and so we'll define ourselves merely as saints or as Christians or believers but I never think of myself anymore as a sinner yet Paul's argument is clear Paul holds that all people sin all people are held accountable for sin and that humanity is a race we are sinners without hope save his sovereign mercy so let me say something to you this morning don't drink the kool-aid of the contemporary culture concerning the uprightness of humanity concerning the inherent goodness of humanity concerning the idea that we are all children of God regardless of whether or not we are in Christ we are sinners let that paragraph have its proper weight we have a solidarity with

Adam and really if you wonder whether death really reigns if death rules if we're all under the penalty of sin verses 12 or excuse me verses 13 and 14 ought to put any optimistic lens on humanity to rest look what it says for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given but sin is not counted where there is no law yet like even though we didn't have law death still reigned death was reigning from Adam to Moses even those whose sinning was not like that direct violation of a command that Adam committed him being a type of one who was to come let me say a word on those two verses the result of sin in the world is that death reigned it's an interesting word in the text

I mean death is ruling death reigned over the entire human race the reason he inserts that little line about the law from Adam to Moses is not to confuse you but to reinforce for you the point he's making about our universal condition he's telling you hey even without law which God brought into the world to make sin known death was still reigning death wins over the whole human race that ought to prove to you that we are all under the judgment of God once Paul has you there now he's ready to move back to speaking not of our solidarity with Adam but the superiority of Christ and just head it verses 15 to 17 this way the superiority of

Christ by way of contrast verses 18 to 21 the superiority of Christ by way of comparison look at the contrast death to many via the one is replaced by justification of the many from Christ the rule of death brought on by the one is contrasted with the rule isn't that fascinating it actually uses that rule reign reigning word again at the end of 17 by the reign of life that is given to you by Christ and how does he do it well there's a rhetorical element here in his argument let me show it to you verse 15 for if much more look at verse 17 in the

Greek it's the same although in the English it just says if you could actually read it for if and then look further in verse 17 much more in other words his argument by way of contrast is this from the lesser much more to the greater it's a lesser to greater argument he contrasts Adam and Christ in that way for if many died through the one man sin much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many there's an echo there of Isaiah 53 where the suffering servant makes in his righteousness is extended to the many and not only are we justified verse 16 we are going to reign in life through him verse 17 and notice how do you get this how do you move from solidarity with

[26 : 15] Adam to reigning in life with Christ what's what's the what's the acting agent verse 15 it's a free gift it's a free gift verse 15 uses that phrase twice it's a free gift that comes to you by grace now can you imagine that that's something God has for you this morning a free gift of grace that will make you justified in his presence and enable life to be reigning in you now and forever more rather than being united to the idea of sin and death and separation forever the free gift comes to you because of the superiority of Christ but look what he does in 18 to 21 he speaks of the superiority of

Christ by way of comparison we've already showed it to you he has the comparison there three times and each time it's almost as if he's using not a lesser to greater argument he's using an argument here that's more like cause and effect so take a look at it in that light therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men cause and effect so also one act of righteousness cause leads to justification in life for all men wow one act of righteousness has bearing for all people that's amazing because we live our lives thinking that we will be made right with God through a multitude of good or righteous acts and what the Bible says is be done with that you cannot work your way in good works toward a relationship with

God there was one act it happened 2000 years ago when a man died on the cross who made payment for sin that alone would satisfy the wrath of God and through whom if you attach yourself by way of faith trust reliance rest upon that act to be sufficient as payment for all your unrighteous sins you will be made righteous what a phenomenal gift this transforming act of God's grace the disobedience of the one which led to the death of all so to the obedience of one leads to life and the righteousness of all I think of Winston Churchill there was one point in after the war when the war was secure World War II he said something to the effect of never in the history of the human race have so many owed so much to so few what a line but think of the gospel never have so many owed so much to the one that's the gospel and when that begins to rise in your soul

Paul becomes worth reading the hard work is worth it because I recognized this morning that while I had a solidarity with Adam that moved me from sin and death and my whole life just raining death you know we're just breathing disaster everywhere we turn until we die I can come to Christ who will give me much more on the other side in the aspect of life I can come to Christ and be righteous in that which leads to eternal life that's the gospel look at the word grace in here I'm going to close with this by way of conclusion what do we see today about

God's grace we saw in verse 15 that the grace of God is a free gift we also see in verse 15 that the grace of the one man Jesus Christ does what it abounds for many it isn't just offered I mean almost picture something running to you the grace of God is running to you for many take a look further in verse 17 those who receive the abundance it's just it's overflowing it's not only abounding it's overflowing grace and then take a look at verse 20 very last phrase grace abounded all the more it's a very interesting thing what Paul does there I mean the word abounded is kind of a superlative right it didn't just say grace came to many no grace abounded to many but here it's grace abounded all the more because he's tacked on another word to abounded he's tacked on the word super the grace of

[32 : 14] God super abounded grace grace grace grace is coming grace is abundant grace is overflowing grace is super abundantly available in Christ what a great and wonderful thing this truth is what has given rise to so many hymns marvelous grace of our loving Lord grace that exceeds our sin and guilt yonder on calvary's mount outpoured grace where the blood of the lamb was split grace grace marvelous grace grace that will pardon and cleanse within God's grace infinite grace grace that is greater than all my sin well you've come this morning and we're halfway through a sophisticated and sustained argument on the depths of a salvation message that's not easy reading but it's reading worth working at because maybe for you you begin to see how you can move from a solidarity with Adam that is just going to reap destruction in your life here and evermore to a singular faith in Christ whose grace is superior in every way that is what

Paul would have for you today let me pray our heavenly father this letter which is undoubtedly the most significant letter written to the church in regard to its impact and influence of any that you have given to us is not always easy to understand both for its substance and its style but we thank you that we've made progress today in bringing our minds to work on it in a way that shows the superiority of Christ and may that grow in our hearts may we abound and overflow in appreciation toward you we ask in Jesus name amen so