



14.
'In Christ alone'
Romans 5.12-21

Background

This is one of the most important passages in Paul's letter to the Romans – and also one of the most difficult! The general sense, however, is clear: it's the details which can get a bit complicated. So, you're best to stand sufficiently far back from the text, as it were, to be able to get the basic thrust of what Paul is saying.

Part of the difficulty derives from the fact that we live in a very individualistic culture, where we're accustomed to think of the 'self' in isolation from those around us: and basic to the biblical perspective on our identity is the assertion that there is a fundamentally 'corporate' or 'communal' aspect to our humanity.

Paul's starting point, accordingly, is that we are all inherently implicated in the sin of Adam, who 'headed up' our humanity: we are all 'in Adam'.

The writer to the Hebrews illustrates the same perspective when (in [Heb.7.4-10](#)), with reference to Abraham's paying a tithe to Melchizedek the priest, he speaks of Levi (the priestly tribe, descended from Abraham) as being still 'in the body of his ancestor'.

Because we are, by nature, 'in Adam' – our 'head' or 'representative' – we are all tainted by sin, a truth borne out by the fact that we all die (for death is the 'wages' of sin, rather than simply a 'fact of life').

It's over against that reality that the grace of God in Jesus is here described in similar terms. Jesus came as a man to do what Adam had signally failed to do: as the 'second Adam' Jesus has come to 'head up' a new humanity. Where Adam's sin tainted all who are in Adam and thus death reigns, Jesus' righteousness is imputed, and increasingly imparted, to all who are in Him – 'in Christ'.

That's the basic comparison Paul is drawing here – note how Paul refers to Adam as 'a *pattern* of the one who was to come' (ie Jesus). As well as this basic comparison, however, Paul also draws a series of contrasts, to indicate how much better and more expansive is the spread and effect of the grace of God in Jesus than the effect and spread of sin in the case of Adam. If you can get that it's a basic 'compare and contrast' exercise in which Paul's engaging it'll help you to see better what he's saying here!

Read the whole passage and if short of time concentrate on '**days**' (1), (5) and (7).

1) Monday 22nd April – intruders

Read [Romans 5.12](#)

“.. in this way death came to all people ..” (Rom.5.12)

Sin and death. Both of them intruders into the world God made. And both of them all-pervasive: we *all* sin and we *all* die. The two great realities for which we, none of us, have an answer. It's not how it was meant to be. And in Christ alone they're addressed.

How does our society seek to explain and to handle these two realities?

If sin is an 'intruder' why did God in His sovereignty allow sin to come into His good and perfect world?

How would you answer those who argue that 'sin' is an outdated and unhelpful construct, and that the way people behave is due to chemical imbalances in the brain, something in their genes, or the way they've been brought up?

What are we to make of the fact that death entered the world 'through sin'?

Prayer: *How grieved Your holy heart must be, O Lord, to have seen the stain upon Your good creation occasioned by our sin. May I see all sin as abhorrent and flee from it.*

2) Tuesday 23rd April – rebels

Read [Romans 5.13-14](#)

“.. nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam ..” (Rom.5.14)

From the start, death is seen to be the 'wages' of sin, the price that is paid in a moral universe for rebellion against its Maker, the 'Author of life'. It didn't require the giving of 'the law' for rebels to be sinners. The universal 'reign' of death demonstrated that.

Why does Paul see the need to draw attention to the period between the sin of Adam and the giving of the Law in the time of Moses?

What does Paul mean by speaking of Adam as 'a pattern of the one to come'?

Prayer: *What loving wisdom You have shown, when all was sin and shame – a second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came. How wonderful are Your sovereign ways!*

3) Wednesday 24th April – the new humanity

Read [Romans 5.15](#)

“.. the gift is not like the trespass ..” (Rom.5.15)

A 'compare-and-contrast' exercise. There are two 'humanities' – the one headed up by Adam, whose sin meant that the 'sin-and-death gene' passed to every member; and the new humanity, headed up by Jesus, experiencing in Him an overflow of grace.

What does Paul mean when he declares that ‘many died by the trespass of the one man’?

In what ways have you been aware of God’s grace ‘overflowing’ in your life?

Prayer: My table Thou hast furnished in presence of my foes: my head Thou dost anoint with oil and my cup overflows! How lavish has been Your grace towards me, Lord!

4) Thursday 25th April – right with God

Read [Romans 5.16](#)

“.. nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin ..” (Rom.5.16)

Here’s the contrast. In the case of the original Adam’s family, *one* sin resulted in guilt, condemnation and death, contaminating everyone. In Jesus’ case, the *many* sins of His people have all been covered by *His* death, resulting in their being right with God.

How can you impress on those around you the dreadful reality of God’s righteous judgment and the consequent condemnation?

What is ‘the gift of God’ which ‘brought justification’?

Prayer: Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, Lord, but now am found, was blind but now I see. All praise be to You, O Lord!

5) Friday 26th April – grace abounding

Read [Romans 5.17](#)

“.. God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness ..” (Rom.5.17)

The sin of the first man, Adam, had huge repercussions for all humanity. But however great those repercussions were, they are as nothing compared to the abundance of grace and life which Jesus, the new ‘head Man’, has secured for His people!

In what ways might “God’s abundant provision of grace” be given expression in the life of our fellowship?

How would it be obvious to anyone coming in to share our life that this abundance of grace is a great gospel reality?

What would you say to friends who asked *how* they could ‘receive God’s abundant provision of grace’?

What does Paul mean when he says that believers will ‘reign in life’?

Prayer: May I be truly thankful, Lord, that You have blessed Your people with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms: make me similarly generous towards others!

6) Saturday 27th April – in Christ

Read [Romans 5.18-19](#)

“.. through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous ..”
(Rom.5.19)

The Bible bids us think *corporately*. Toothache affects the whole body. The sin of the first man tainted all humanity: the poison of sin infected the whole body politic. Grace works similarly: the victory of Jesus over sin and death is given to all who are ‘in Him’!

When Paul speaks about ‘one righteous act’ to what is he referring?

Does what Paul says in v.18 (‘life for all people’) mean that everyone will be saved – and if not, why not?

Prayer: *How rich You are in Your mercy, Lord! And how thankful I am that though I was dead in transgressions and sin You have raised me to life in Christ!*

7) Sunday 28th April – eternal life

Read [Romans 5.20-21](#)

“.. so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life ..” (Rom.5.21)

Sin was still sin even without ‘the law’ to define it: the law simply made the fact of sin all the more evident. But if sin thus became more pronounced (‘increased’), God’s grace in Jesus abounds towards His people all the more, imparting eternal life to us.

What does Paul mean by saying that ‘the law was brought in so that the trespass might increase’?

If we are saved by grace, do we need to bother with the Law of God – and if so, why and in what ways?

What has been your experience of grace reigning as you’ve sought to trust in the Lord Jesus?

God’s gift in Christ is regularly spoken of as ‘eternal life’ (see for instance [1 John 5.11-12](#)): how would you describe that ‘eternal life’ to someone who asked you what it is?

Prayer: *You have given so freely what I could never earn! I remain a debtor to mercy alone! May my heart overflow with praise today as I join others around Your throne!*