

ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

Romans 5:12-21

Lesson #11

Introduction

This is lesson 11 of our Romans Bible Study. Last week we covered chapter 5, verses 6 - 11, where Paul describes God's *demonstration* of His love for us in that while we were still sinners, His Son Jesus Christ was sent to die a brutal and humiliating death to pay the price for our sins. For the sins of those whom God has pledged to love with an everlasting love. Now, coming off of that explanation, Paul moves into a brief segment where he explains something that probably everyone who is familiar with the Bible has struggled with at one time or another. He has already covered the concept of original sin, and the total depravity of mankind, but now he takes the time to explain the workings of that whole process in very understandable and logical terms. It's perfectly natural, when first hearing about Adam's sin, to ask how it's fair to extend the punishment for that sin onto us, who weren't even born at the time. How can this be fair and righteous we wonder in our minds? In these next 10 verses Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, manages to give an explanation that's clear, and understandable, and completely logical, and resolves all of our previous misgivings on this issue. So, let's look at those verses. I've titled this lesson:

One Man's Sin, One Man's Righteousness

12 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— 13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 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.

15 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. 16 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. 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.

18 So then 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. 19 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. 20 The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 5:12-21 (NASB)

Verse 12:

12 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

This is the verse that immediately causes us some trouble. After all, if a man commits a crime, we don't punish his children and grandchildren, we think that's unfair. Yet this verse says that through one man's sin of disobedience, death entered the creation of God, and every man and woman, and every tree and animal would now eventually grow old and die. It says that by virtue of Adam's disobedience, something called sin entered into tangible creation, and that it spread to every inhabitant of that creation. Like a plague enters a town or city, and then spreads to everyone who lives there. It came in through one person, but it spread to everyone. And like a plague, unless treated effectively, sin has only one conclusion, death. Here we see sin described more as a virulent disease than a specific crime. It is the **result** of a crime, the crime of disobedience to God, but it has the consequence of spreading death to all who are in its path. And unfortunately for us, that includes every occupant of planet earth, and probably the cosmos as well. Once released into creation, sin does the job it was designed to do, it brings death.

Now at this point many may be asking why God allowed such a thing? Why would this loving God, that we just read about in verses 6 - 11, allow sin to enter into His creation and bring death to every creature that would be born into it?

The answer may shock some of us, but the answer that the scriptures give us is that God planned it that way from the very beginning, because it serves the purpose that He himself designed it to accomplish. Sin did not surprise God, nor did it cause Him to change His original plan, it is fully a part of His eternal design, and He is using it to accomplish His divine and eternal purposes. We tend to see everything from a perspective that's based on the here and now, the immediate future, and our health and happiness right now, but we must understand that God sees everything from an eternal perspective, that existed before creation ever took place, and will continue for all eternity. There are many unpleasant things, even in this present day, that we understand we must endure for the greater good, and since we understand that, we accept it and move on. But do we understand that God has a greater plan than our immediate earthly situation, and there are many things involved in that plan that we must endure for the greater and long term good, in a new and eternal creation that is totally without sin.

God has predetermined that every inhabitant of His eternal kingdom will know first hand the ravages of this disease called sin, so that we are capable of comprehending the value of that free gift of perfect righteousness that we receive by the grace of God, through the works of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. He does not bestow this gift on the righteous but on unworthy sinners, because only those are capable of truly appreciating its immense value. Why did Jesus say:

13 *"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion (loyalty), and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."* (Mt 9:13)

and again,

17 And hearing this, Jesus said* to them, *"It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."* (Mk 2:17)

and again,

32 *"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."* (Lk 5:32)

If we understand that God planned that humanity would fall into sin by our own doing, and fully intended that to happen, because He was intent on having humanity see for themselves that sin is a virulent and deadly disease, and if introduced into any environment it will kill everything it touches, every time. This is a painful lesson for sure, but one that humanity had to learn before it could comprehend the value of righteousness. Why is God so dead set against sin? Because He knows the inevitable, and inescapable consequences of it - death.

It's absolutely necessary to understand all of this to be able to fully comprehend the verses we're now examining in Romans 5. This background helps to show the bigger picture of what's really happening, and why God does some things that we might think is unfair. But it doesn't seem unfair at all when we see the bigger picture, in fact, it's amazingly clear and logical and righteous and loving. God has a vested interest in humanity, and in John 4:23-24 Jesus tells us what that interest is. He desires to have a family of worshipers who worship Him in spirit and in truth. It was absolutely essential for these beings (humans) to understand sin and depravity so that they could also know both the meaning and value of the holiness of God. To worship God in spirit and in truth requires that we know both **who** He is and **why** we worship Him, and have a full understanding of His divine and holy attributes, so that we worship Him because we want to, not because we're forced to. This is why sin entered into the world through one man's disobedience, and spread to all of his offspring. Because God is using it to educate His eventual family of worshipers. If we don't understand this then we're caught up in endless debates over God's fairness and righteousness and loving kindness. But God's righteousness does not need to be defended, it only needs to be understood, then there's nothing to defend, there's just amazement at His wisdom.

I realize we've taken a lot of time to describe this, but it seems of little use to me to discuss these verses in Romans 5, if we don't understand the background against which they must be applied. I've heard countless debates among the Christian community over the fairness of God to impute Adam's sin onto his offspring, and countless lame excuses conjured up to try to defend God's honor, and in every case it was because those in that debate had no idea of what God was doing nor why He was doing it. Again I say, God's Honor and Righteousness need no defending, they simply need to be understood, and when they are, our questions turn into worship and amazement. An ignorant world questions every action, and law, and commandment of God, but an informed Christian falls to their knees in worship at His infinite wisdom. I pray that we will be the latter. Now we're rightly equipped to read and understand the remainder of these verses:

Verse 13:

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

This is a simple enough verse to understand. It simply says that sin, in the form of unrighteousness was in the world before God gave specific commandments to abstain, but until there were specific commandments, there was no specific legal standards, given by a party of authority, by which those practicing such things could be indicted. We are given an innate sense of right and wrong at our birth, but we need written laws to define and establish the extent of those things which we consider acceptable and those that we do not. And so it is with God. He eventually gave mankind a very clear and detailed set of laws and ordinances, through Moses, to establish His legal boundaries for humanity. Today we often hear someone say that what someone else has done is wrong, but there's no law against it, so no crime has been committed, but it may well have been entirely sinful. This is what the Law of Moses did, it established God's specific Laws as authoritative and makes disobedience a crime against God, (called sin) that has specific legal consequences.

If mankind could keep all those laws we would be exceedingly well off, and God would bless us beyond our wildest imagination, but because we cannot, and we will not, those laws that could make life wonderful, instead make us constant criminals against God, because we are constantly in disobedience to His laws. Paul will speak more of this in subsequent verses.

Verse 14:

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.

What is the point here? What does it mean from Adam until Moses? We just read that sin is not imputed when there is no law, and there was no formal law, but one, in the time of Adam, all the way to Moses. Nevertheless, Adam's sin of disobedience still caused the death of every human born (except Enoch) even before the laws of Moses were presented. Furthermore, it caused the death of those who had not committed the same sin that Adam committed.

But then this verse goes on to say that Adam is a "type" of Him who is to come. Who is this talking about, and how is Adam a "type" or example of someone else? Paul is carefully laying the groundwork for his explanation for Christ's redemption, and how it can be made to apply to multitudes of others without any violation of righteousness or fairness on the part of God. We're probably all heard this topic discussed from the perspective of Adam and mankind, but have we ever considered it from the perspective of God? The scriptures tell us that Christ alone was predestined from before creation to die on behalf of all of God's elect, to save us from our multitudes of sins, so how does God make this action fair and righteous? If He is going to allow just one Man to die for all, then the only fair thing is that just one man get them into this situation from the beginning. I don't know if I've ever heard this preached from this perspective, but I stand by the validity nonetheless. We are prone to assume a time line that's based on human existence and our creation, but we seem to forget that God planned everything well in advance, well before there ever was a creation or any humans.

The better question isn't how God can allow all humanity to be plunged into sin by the acts of just one man, but much more importantly, how can He make the redemption of multitudes of humanity by just one Man, a fair and righteous act? Do you see how clear and righteous God's actions are when we just understand them a little better?

Concerning Adam's being a "type" of Him who was to come, we see that just as every human who exists came through the genealogical lineage of Adam, and no other means of being exists, likewise, every spiritually born again believer came through belief in Jesus Christ, and there's no other means for them to exist. Adam represents the beginning of a whole line of lost mankind, and Jesus Christ represents the beginning of a line of redeemed believers who are spiritually alive. Now let's continue with Paul's explanation:

Verses 15-16:

15 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. 16 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

Here Paul explains the immense difference between the sin of Adam, that plunged mankind into condemnation, and the righteous act of Jesus Christ, that resulted in our justification. We see the grace of God and the grace of Christ both described in these verses. The difference between the actions and results of Christ, and those of Adam, is that Adam's one sin caused condemnation of many others, but on the other hand, the righteousness of Christ covers the whole multitudes of sins of every believer who will ever live.

It is in this way that Adam is a "type" of Christ, not by any means by his righteousness, but rather in his own personal actions ending up affecting many multitudes of others. It was Adam that brought condemnation into humanity, and it was Jesus Christ that brought justification of humanity before God. Speaking obviously of those who believe in Jesus Christ. Continuing Paul says:

Verse 17:

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.

In this verse, as in a prior verse, there's two terms that I want us to see clearly and not just run right past. The first term is, *the abundance of grace*, and the second is *the gift of righteousness*.

The first term speaks of God's grace in its abundance. If we pause and reflect for a moment on the monumental difference in the eternal future of those who receive this gift of grace from those who do not, we're unable to even put a value on it for the sheer magnitude of it. Understanding this perfectly, Jesus said: *26 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matt 16:26) If you were asked the question - what is the value of the grace of God, what would you answer? Even Jesus himself didn't try to answer that, He simply left it as an open question. Because there is no comparison that we can make, it is the highest of gifts and beyond valuation in terms of similar comparisons. The term *the abundance of grace* hardly does it justice. The volume and magnitude of the offences forgiven, and the indescribable treasure lavished on previously unworthy sinners is surely an immeasurable *abundance of grace*, for which we cannot find adequate words to describe.

And the second term, *the gift of righteousness*. Those of you who are familiar with our teachings will hopefully remember some of our earlier lessons on this subject. We said before, and reaffirm now, that without the gift of righteousness, heaven would not be substantially any better than the age and world we live in right now. The single most glaring difference between this creation, and the new creation (Rev 21:1) is that in that new one, there will be no more sin nor temptation, forever. It will be holy and undefiled, and nothing sinful will ever enter into it. You and I will no longer have this fallen sinful nature and mindset, but we will be fully transformed into the likeness of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (Rom 8:29-30; Phi 3:20-21, 1Jn 3:2) *The gift of eternal life is made valuable by the quality of that life.* (repeat) It is first the imputed righteousness of Christ, and then the transformed righteousness of our own resurrected bodies and fully transformed souls that makes the kingdom of God heaven. It would not be heaven to a fallen sinner, it would be an impossible and eternal torture, where everything they desire is prohibited. It would be like making an atheist go to church seven days a week, forever, he would rather die, literally.

Heaven has been made exclusively for righteousness, and righteousness is an absolute requirement for entry. This was God's plan from before creation ever began. Everything we're going through now, in this present age, is His predetermined MEANS to bring us to that eventual condition. Beloved, learn to appreciate and earnestly desire righteousness, because without it, no one will ever enter the kingdom of God. (Mat 5:20) After the presence of the holy Trinity, and that loving relationship, righteousness is probably the greatest attribute of heaven. God is using this age, and the things of this age to mold and fashion His elect into the final beings that He desires us to be in His eternal kingdom. For the true Christian, this whole earthly life, and this whole cosmic creation, is simply a temporary and disposable training camp.

Now I don't want to move on until we also look at a third term as well, and that term is, *through the One, Jesus Christ*. Everything that we've just discussed regarding grace and righteousness is administered to humanity *through* a single and unique channel. Through the works of our Lord Jesus Christ. God selected the one single man who would bring sin into the world, Adam, and He selected the One single Man who would provide justification for man's sins, His Son, Jesus Christ. The idea that there are many roads to heaven, and many religions that achieve the same results is not supported

anywhere in the scriptures. God specifically chose each person for their specific task in His divine plan, and there are no substitutions permitted, nor are there any other alternative methods from which we may freely choose. All that God has planned, from before creation, is entirely and exclusively administered *through the One, Jesus Christ*. (Acts 4:12; Jn 14:6)

Verses 18-19:

18 So then 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. 19 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.

After making his point in the previous verses, Paul now sums it all up one more time in very simple language. He says that just as sin entered into men by the sin of one man; in like manner, justification entered into men by the righteous works of one Man. God balances the scales of justice for all eternity, so that there can be no credible objections or charges of unfairness or unrighteousness on the part of God in regards to how He achieves His divine purposes. There is no end to the list of questions and objections this topic generates, and to go into that now far exceeds the scope of this lesson, but God's means are always just and righteous when we understand them thoroughly. It's partial understanding, and wrong understanding that generates virtually all of all the objections I've ever heard. Now for the last two verses:

Verses 20-21:

20 The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

What is Paul saying in this verse - that God gave us His Law so that our sins would increase? That's kind of what it says doesn't it? But let's understand that God doesn't make us sin, He defines for us what sin is, by giving us His perfect Law. And the end result of that is that our own innate nature is exposed as sinful, and we come to know the depth of our own depravity and sin. God's law is not intended to make us sin, but to let us know when we are sinning. Which, unfortunately, is almost all the time. Therefore, after coming to know the righteous law of God, our own sin, at least the knowledge of it, is increased. And this was necessary so that we would also be able to comprehend the abundance of God's grace in His mercy toward us. Because, regardless of how sinful we came to realize that we are, the grace of Christ **abounded even more**. The righteousness of Jesus Christ triumphed to the heavens above the total cumulative sins of the entirety of the chosen of God. It wasn't even close, it wasn't that it just barely sufficed, but that it towered above sin like a mountain towers above a deep valley. Now don't misunderstand, I'm not implying that Jesus suffered more than was necessary to accomplish His task, but that the victory that He accomplished towered over the ravages of sin in the lives of God's elect.

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

We see that sin reigns, that is it controls and masters all who are under its dominion, and their destiny is death, which is the ultimate power that sin has over all humanity. But, just like sin reigns in death, even so grace reigns in the lives of the elect through righteousness, to the result of our eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. The reign of sin is death, but the reign of grace is sinless righteousness that supports eternal life, and that is both by and through the single and exclusive administration of Jesus Christ the Lord.

One of the most notable aspects of this verse is how it so nicely ties things together. It ties grace to righteousness, and righteousness to eternal life, and all of this to Jesus Christ. God implements His plan by the use of various means, and He uses these means, each in their own specific way, to accomplish the various elements of the overall plan. Each is a vital part, and all tie together to make a chain of sorts. The grace of God is His gift of imputed righteousness through belief in His Son, Jesus Christ, which belief itself is also a gift as well. (Eph 2:8) But that's not the end of it. Inherent in this gift of faith is the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration, whereby the recipient is literally reborn in spirit and made to see and appreciate righteousness and detest the sin that formerly ruled his heart. Now this individual is suitable material for the work of progressive sanctification, (1Pet 1:2) which will eventually be made complete by an act of Jesus Christ. (Phi 3:21) It is only such as these who are suitable inhabitants for the eternal kingdom of God, and it is only such as these who really want to be there in the first place.

Make no mistake, there are many who don't want to be in hell, but that's not the same thing as wanting to be in heaven. Many say they want to go to heaven simply because they want to avoid the alternative, not because they've come to see the glory of God, and the value of perfect righteousness. If asked, many say they want to go to heaven because they perceive that they'll be reunited with their earthly loved ones, and God, and Christ, and righteousness don't even occur to them. It's very difficult to believe that these who seek heaven for such reasons are really going to end up there at all.

Again I will say that the gift of perfect righteousness, the gift of total and eternal severance from sin and temptation, and the privilege of worshiping God forever, are the heart and soul of the true Christian's hopes and aspirations. It is so because that's what God is doing in this present age, He is molding and shaping His elect into those beings that love Him with all their heart, all their soul, all their mind, and all their strength, and it is the likes of these whom God is seeking to be His eternal worshipers. Of course we can't do that perfectly now, while we're still organically attached to these corrupted and sinful earthly bodies, but that is what makes us so excited, and exuberant, and expectant, for the time when we are released from these corrupted bodies and given new and eternal and incorruptible bodies, whereby we might be with Him forever. (1Cor 15:50-57)

Conclusion:

Now I just want to add some closing thoughts here. These verses we've just examined give us some wonderful insights into the nature and character of God, and how He works out His divine plan for this creation. In my 33+ years as a Christian I've seen and experienced first hand many interesting things. Many of those things I was first taught as a young believer, I later came to see as errors, and had to make adjustments in my thinking to properly align with the scriptures.

Much of the debates, and even arguments in Christianity are caused by incomplete knowledge, coupled with a misguided idea that we must protect at all costs even those things that we don't even understand. Maybe to some small degree there's some truth in this, but it's far, far better still to diligently seek to learn the truth, and be willing to listen and learn, than to blindly defend that which we don't really understand. We should never ever be ashamed to admit that we were wrong in our thinking, if we're convinced by scriptures that we were, but rather we should rejoice that God has given us the light. The truth is that God's plan is understandable, because He wants it to be understood, and that's why He gave us His holy scriptures. But it doesn't just fall on us out of the sky, it takes persistent and diligent study to come to the knowledge of the truth, and it often takes much longer that we thought it would. And it always involves surrendering some of our own personal ideas and yielding to the divine word of God. If you really want to know the truth, and to find wisdom, then ask God for it, over and over again, and then be willing to receive it in the time and manner that He determines. To Him be the glory, forever. Amen

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami
Robert Andrews, Pastor
04/01/12