

Sermon: From Adam to Christ: The Grace that Conquers all our Sin (Romans 5:12-19)

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PART I

G. K. CHESTERTON FAMOUSLY once said that original sin is the most empirically

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verifiable of all Christian doctrines. Just looking at the history of the twentieth century confirms this judgment. In the early decades of the twentieth century 1.5 million Armenians were killed and deported by the Turks. It is estimated that 11 million were murdered in the holocaust ordered by Hitler, including 6 million Jews. Scholars suggest that Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union killed between 20-50 million. It is estimated that Mao Zedong murdered between 50-70 million in China. Pol Pot killed between 1.5 and 2 million in

Cambodia, which is about 20% of the population. In the 1990s the Rwandan Genocide meant the murder of 800,000 Tutsis and Hutus, about 20%

of the population. It is said that Slobodan Milosevic killed around 230,000 in the war in former Yugoslavia.

Now these shocking and staggering numbers are not just mere statistics on a page. Every one of the people murdered was an individual like you and me with hopes, dreams, fears, and joys. Every one of these individuals was a person of dignity and significance, created in God's image and made for God's glory. Truly, these numbers are stunning and staggering. They are a testimony to the depth of evil in the human heart.

Original sin is not just evident in the big events of history; it is also evident in the small things of life as well. For example, we don't have to teach our children to be selfish and to say "mine" and to whine and cry if things don't go their way. Original sin shows up when husbands and wives fight and get divorced, when children fight and quarrel, when people commit sexual sin, when people in business cheat, and when people in government use God-given authority and power to their own

advantage and for their own gain. G. K. Chesterton was certainly not wrong. Sadly, original sin with all of its disastrous consequences, both individually and corporately, can be empirically verified and one of the most important texts in Scripture which describes how all of this came about is the apostle Paul's classic discussion of original sin in Romans 5:12-14. Let us look at this text before we spend our time today unpacking it and learning from it.

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 a type of the one who was to come.

In this very important text, I see three main truths which we want to look at in turn: (1) Sin and death came into the world through Adam; (2) People sin because they are spiritually dead; (3) Death reigned even over those who sinned without the law.

SIN AND DEATH CAME INTO THE WORLD THROUGH ADAM

This truth is evident in verse 12: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin." The one man, as verse 12 makes clear, is Adam. Before we go any further it is important to note that Paul, along with the entire scriptural revelation, considers Adam to be a historical person. There is no evidence here that the reference to Adam is symbolic or mythical. Unfortunately, I have to state this point so emphatically because some scholars within evangelical circles—for example, Peter Enns and Kenton Sparks—argue that Romans 5 does not demand a historical Adam. This assertion is unconvincing. Genesis presents Adam as a historical person, just as it does Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So too, our

Lord refers to Adam as a historical figure (Matt 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12). And here Paul contrasts Adam and Christ, which implies that Paul viewed Adam as a real, historical individual. In fact, the relation between Adam-Christ is so tight in these verses that one cannot deny a historical Adam without denying a historical Christ. If Adam is mythical then Christ is mythical. This is no small issue and Christians must not compromise at this point. Without a historical Adam it becomes nearly impossible to distinguish creation from fall in Scripture, and the entire explanation for the universality of sin in the human race is left hanging in mid-air. Thus, when Paul says "one man," he means one man, not a symbol and not a myth. We must be careful of the tendency today to subordinate the biblical witness to human wisdom, to compromise on what Scripture says because it does not seem to accord with modern sensibilities. So, when Paul says sin came into the world through one man, he thinks of Adam and Eve in the garden in Genesis 3.

In addition, we should note as well that what Paul says here confirms male headship—which is important in the larger debate within evangelical circles over complementarianism and egalitarianism. If Paul were an egalitarian we would expect him to say that sin entered the world through Eve. After all, Eve sinned first, not Adam. So, if there were no role differences between men and women Paul should say sin entered the world through Eve. But Paul says sin entered the world through Adam, for as the husband, as the head of the family, he was ultimately responsible for sin entering the world. So we have confirmation from this passage that God instituted male headship before sin entered the world, and that it was particularly Adam's responsibility to prevent sin from entering.

What Paul emphasizes here is that sin entered the world through Adam's sin. The world God made was very good, and Adam and Eve were to rule the world for the glory of God and keep sin from entering the world. But they both gave into sin in the garden, and the world, sadly and tragically,

has never been the same since. The consequence and result of sin was death, both spiritually and physically. God threatened Adam that if he sinned and ate of the forbidden fruit he would surely die (Gen 2:17). Adam and Eve died spiritually the day they ate the fruit, for their relationship with God was broken by their sin. And their spiritual death led eventually to their physical death which is evident by the constant refrain in the genealogical record of Genesis 5—“and they died.”

So the death spoken of here is not just physical death, nor is it just spiritual death. The word death here includes both realities. Both spiritual and physical death were introduced into the world through Adam’s sin. Futility, frustration, heart-rending sorrow, boredom, quarreling, envy, and jealousy all testify to the presence of spiritual death. These things were not originally in the good world God made: they are the fruit of Adam’s sin.

PEOPLE SIN BECAUSE THEY ARE SPIRITUALLY DEAD

This principle is also seen in 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.” What we are looking at here is the last part of verse 12, which says that “death spread to all men because all sinned.” We already saw that sin and death entered the world through one man, Adam. Paul confirms this in the last part of verse 12. He tells us “so death spread to all men.”

Thus, the death of Adam was not confined to himself. Adam brought death into the world for all people for all time, which is what Christian theology has referred to as “original sin.” As a result of Adam’s sin, every single human being who comes into this world is now “in Adam.” His sin becomes their sin; his sin is transmitted to them. Adam, as the first man and head of the human race, due to his one act of disobedience is the fountainhead of death and sin. On the basis of their relationship to Adam, as the sons and daugh-

ters of Adam, all people are born into the world as Ephesians 2 says dead in trespasses and sins. No one is born innocent or neutral towards God: they are born—as Romans 8 says—with hostility and enmity towards God. This fits with Romans 5:12 which says that “death spread to all men because all sinned.”

I actually think the words translated “because” are incorrect here. I think a better translation is “as a result.” So, Paul is saying that all people because they are children of Adam come into the world spiritually dead, and as a result of this spiritual deadness they sin against God. First comes spiritual deadness and then comes sin. So, our sin is a consequence of our spiritual death, our separation from God. We are born into this world spiritually dead, with no ability to obey God’s law as Romans 8:7-8 declares: “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law, indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

As 1 Corinthians 2:14 teaches, we are born as natural men who do not accept the things of God. We are, as Ephesians 2:3 says, born as those who are under God’s wrath. Our sin, then, is a reflection of our nature, of our belonging to Adam. This brings us to the third truth in the text, which we find in verses 13-14.

DEATH REIGNED EVEN OVER THOSE WHO SINNED WITHOUT THE LAW

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 a type of the one who was to come (Rom 5:13-14).

What is Paul getting at in these verses? Let’s look at what he says step by step. First, look at the time period he is thinking about. He tells us three times what the time period is. He speaks of the time “before the law was given” (verse 13), and again a time “where there is no law.” Another

way of talking about this is evident in verse 14, for there he speaks of the time from “Adam to Moses.” So, Paul thinks of the interval where there was no Mosaic law, when there were no commands from Mt. Sinai.

Now these observations rule out already one very popular interpretation: Paul is not thinking about the fate of babies in these verses. You don’t need to talk about the time from Adam to Moses if you are talking about babies. If Paul were talking about babies what he says here would be always true. He wouldn’t need to limit himself to the time between Adam and Moses. Paul restricts himself to a time in history when people lived without the Mosaic law. The second thing Paul tells us in these verses is that sin still existed in the world in the time period between Adam and Moses.

Now that is obvious isn’t it? We think of Cain murdering Abel, the evil of the flood generation, and the tower of Babel. Yes, sin exercised great power during this time. But what does Paul mean when he says that “sin is not counted where there is no law”? Some very good theologians think Paul means by this that people in the time period from Adam to Moses were not judged for their own sins but for Adam’s sin since Paul says that sin is not counted. But the idea that sin is not counted for those who lived in time between Adam and Moses does not fit with the rest of the Bible. For example, those who were punished at the flood were not just punished for Adam’s sin. They were clearly punished for their own sin. So too, those who sinned in making the tower of Babel were punished for their own sin, not just Adam’s sin. This fits with what Paul says in Romans 2:12, “Those who sinned without the law will also perish without the law.”

Paul’s argument here isn’t that they perish because they sin in Adam (though that is true too). No, his point, as the subsequent verses make clear, is that God’s law is written on their heart and on their conscience. So, even those who do not have the Mosaic law know God’s moral norms, and they are judged and perish for violating the

law written on their heart. But then what does Paul mean when he says that sin is not counted when there is no law? We have just seen that he can’t mean that sin isn’t judged and punished. Otherwise the story of the flood makes no sense. So, what does Paul mean when he says that sin is not reckoned? He probably means that sin is not technically reckoned as transgression if there is no written law. They sinned and violated God’s will and his moral norms, but they did not transgress a specifically revealed commandment. Verse 14 proves that they were punished for their sin, because Paul says “death reigned from Adam to Moses.” In other words, those who lived in the time period from Adam to Moses still died because they sinned.

But Paul adds that their sin was not like Adam’s sin. They did not violate a commandment that was specifically revealed by God like Adam did. Paul tells us that Adam was a type of Christ. But he was very different from Jesus Christ, for he brought sin and death into the world and Jesus brought life and righteousness into the world. *The doctrine of original sin reminds us that we live in a world marred and stained by sin, by a world that is imperfect.*

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

What, then, are the practical implications of original sin and death for us as believers today? First, let’s not expect unbelievers to act like Christians. There is never any excuse for sin, and so they are responsible for sinning, but let’s not be surprised if unbelievers lie, cheat, steal, look at pornography, commit adultery, hate their parents, and live for the comforts of the world. Their main need is not moral reformation but salvation through Jesus Christ.

Second, sometimes I have heard Christians say they aren’t going to vote in an election because no candidate is good enough. But what do we expect in a sinful world? Do we expect perfect candidates? Don’t we recognize in a sinful world that sometimes we need to choose the lesser of two evils? In a sinful world some countries are better

than others. It is much better to live in Germany today than it is to live in Somalia. Neither country is Christian, and the main need of people in both countries is salvation, but politically Germany is far better off than Somalia.

Third, we can apply this to our life in the church. Beware of a critical attitude that expects a kind of perfection in church. How many people leave churches if the youth program isn't quite right or they don't like the music played or if a better preacher moves into town? Those who move may appeal to their high standards but the problem may be more in terms of their own fault finding, negative and perfectionistic spirit.

Fourth, singles. Be sure you don't forsake marriage because you are looking for the perfect spouse. How many singles today fail to marry a person they should marry because they are seeking for a standard of beauty or handsomeness in a spouse that is unrealistic, a standard that has more to do with lust than love. Or, how many expect a standard of spirituality and a depth of maturity that is unrealistic. Now, I am not suggesting that one should be a fool when one gets married. But the way some single think of marriage you would think we were still in the garden of Eden before the fall.

Fifth, in our marriages we must recognize a continuing battle with sin. That means two things in loving our spouses. On the one hand, we must do a lot of forgiving and overlooking of faults. It is not loving to point out everything we dislike in our spouse. We need to remember that we may be annoyed because of our own sinful nature, that we are expecting more out of our spouse than is realistic. On the other hand, we should be open to correction by our spouse, for we know that we haven't reached the heavenly city yet. We can always do better spiritually.

Sixth, we need the same balance in raising children. Our children are born into the world as sinners. They need correction and discipline. Now if you stay home from things because your children run too wild and you can't control them, you need

help in raising your children. Find a couple who is doing a good job and learn from them. At the same time, watch out for being overly perfectionistic as a parent. Some parents bark out so many commands to their children that there is no way that their children can keep them all. Remember that they are children who are maturing and growing. Don't expect them to act like an adult.

Seventh, and finally, remember that your only hope of salvation is Jesus Christ. Original sin means that we are all born into the world spiritually dead. Because you have sinned against God you can't be right with him based on your obedience. Your only hope for salvation is through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, who always obeyed God. And he suffered on the cross for our salvation, so that if we put our trust and faith in him we will be saved.

PART II

Even ordinary people can't get away from original sin, even when they try to deny it. Listen to the recent letter about eBay buyer protection from the President and CEO of eBay, John Donahoe:

Dear eBay Shoppers:

After 15 years, we still believe in our founding philosophy: people are basically good. After all, how else could perfect strangers successfully trade with one another millions of times a day? This is what makes eBay so unique. But we also know things don't always go right. That's why we have created our eBay buyer protection. It's our way of saying, "We've got you covered."

That's perfect, isn't it? People are basically good, and we have a buyer protection plan! Here is another fascinating example from a book on child-raising by an unbeliever, Burton L. White. Burton White is one of the foremost researchers and scholars on children today, and has engaged in careful empirical research on children for decades. The book is titled *The New First Three Years of Life* (New York: Fireside, 1985).

Here is an interesting quote about children:

From fifteen to sixteen months on, as his self-awareness becomes more substantial, something in his nature we don't fully understand will lead him to deliberately try each of these forbidden activities, specifically to see what will be allowed and what won't. In other words, he will begin systematically to challenge the authority of the adult he lives with. Resistance to simple requests becomes very common at this time, and if there is more than one child around, this can be a low point in the parenting experience (115-16).

Here are the key words: "something in his nature we don't fully understand." But we do understand it because God has revealed that we are sinners from birth because we are sons and daughters of Adam. Let's then hear the word of the Lord in Romans 5:15-19.

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. 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.

Let us breakdown this important text in three steps: (1) Let us note how the apostle Paul stresses the impact of Adam's sin on the entire human race; (2) Let us ask the very difficult yet important

question: "why does God hold us responsible for Adam's sin?" (3) Let us unpack the Adam-Christ contrast that our text presents so that we may glory in God's solution to the problem of sin found in our new covenant head, our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE IMPACT OF ADAM'S SIN UPON THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE

Note how Paul tells us five times about the impact of Adam's sin upon the entire human race. This is how the Bible explains the universality of human sin—"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). First, in verse 15 we see that "many died through one man's trespass." The "many" here means "all" human beings. Both physical and spiritual death are in view here. All human beings come into the world spiritually dead and will eventually die physically because of Adam's one sin.

Second, notice verse 16, where the text speaks how "the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation." The one trespass, the one sin of Adam, brought condemnation to all people. In other words *all* people are born into the world guilty and condemned before God by virtue of Adam's sin.

Third, verse 17 says that "because of one man's trespass death reigned through that one man." Paul already told us that spiritual and physical death came into the world through Adam's one sin, but he tells us that again. And he emphasizes that death rules over all human beings because of Adam's one sin. Death is conceived of as a power that exerts its sway over all. King Death rules over mankind.

Fourth, verse 18 speaks of the one trespass that "led to condemnation for all men." In case, we didn't get it earlier Paul tells us again. Through the one trespass of Adam all people everywhere enter into the world condemned before God. So, even babies don't enter the world innocent. They come into the world guilty and condemned before God.

Fifth, the text says that "by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners." The rea-

son all people are sinners is because they are sons and daughters of Adam. If we put this all together, I think Paul is saying that Adam is our covenant head, our federal head. God has chosen Adam not only to be the first human being, biologically speaking, but he has also chosen him to represent the entire human race and due to Adam's one act of disobedience, given the unity of the human race, all of us come into the world spiritually dead and condemned before God.

At this point an important question arises: If this is all true, then what about the fate of babies and infants who die before having a chance to hear the gospel? Obviously this question is emotionally charged, yet it is a very important one to reflect on as we wrestle with Scripture. My overall answer, at least initially, is that Scripture doesn't answer this question directly. This text teaches that no one, including infants, deserve to go to heaven. Since infants come into the world as sinners, they need God's mercy for salvation, the same as adults. Furthermore, it is crucial to stress that we can trust our God with the final destiny of infants and of all those whom we love. We know that no one will be in hell who shouldn't be there. As Abraham confessed rightly many years ago: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just" (Gen 18:25). None of us will question God about anyone who is in hell. None of us will be disappointed or grieved or sad when we meet God. Do any of us believe that we are more loving or just than God? Will we need to correct him about the final destiny of human beings? Perish the thought. Who do we think we are?

However, with all that said, if someone pressed me further, I believe God shows mercy to infants who die young. I think that is consistent with the teaching of the whole of Scripture. Scripture does emphasize that people die both for Adam's sin and for acting on one's sinful nature. So, I think there are reasons to think the Lord shows mercy to infants. But for us today, the larger question is this: Can you trust the Lord regarding this matter? Will you trust him? Certainly, we will be able

to trust him more if we know his love, compassion, mercy, justice, and holiness. As we know him better, the same confession that Abraham expressed many years ago will be our confession, yet in a real sense, greater, since we now know the Lord in a greater way than even Abraham knew due to the progress of redemption and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Rest in the Lord today, especially on this matter.

WHY DOES GOD HOLD US RESPONSIBLE FOR ADAM'S SIN?

From this discussion another question naturally arises: Why does God hold us responsible for Adam's sin? Why don't we all come into the world neutral, without a bent and inclination to sin? We might think if we were in Adam's place, we wouldn't have followed his sinful path. We would have chosen differently. Is it, when all is said and done, fair and just that this is the situation of the human race? We can say several things here.

First, if Adam and Eve sinned in a perfect world, in paradise, then you would do the same. You ought not to speculate about what you would do in a similar situation. Such speculation is unwarranted, for it is not the real world but is a fantasy world inside your head. We can easily begin to think that we are better than we are.

Second, the human race is an organic unity, and Adam is the head of the human race. The human race is like family. Imagine a world in which mom and dad did not influence their children. God has made a world in which there is a connection between parents and children. Wouldn't it be a strange world if parents did not affect their kids? Typically, if a child grows up with messed up parents, the child is pretty messed up as well. Alternatively, if a child has good parents, the child usually grows into a healthy adult as well. It would be a bizarre world if how we behaved as parents did not affect our children, if our character as parents had nothing to do with how our children turned out. That is how God structured the world, and we see this clearly in the case of Adam. We are not

disconnected from our first parents. Their actions and their choices have affected us. The doctrine of original sin tells us that this is how God structured the world from the beginning. I think such a structure and pattern for the world makes good sense.

Third, and related to the second point: what if you don't think it makes good sense? My answer, kindly but forcefully back to you is this: Who do you think you are? Are you God? Do you think you are wiser in running the universe than he is? Such a stance is rather arrogant and proud. We must be very careful that we do not place our own understanding, or what we think is best over what God has planned and established. But with that said, it is important to not leave our discussion only on this point, it is also crucial to press on, as Paul does, to contrast what Adam has done with all of its disastrous effects with what the second or last Adam has done, namely our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us now turn to the crucial Adam-Christ contrast in this text.

ADAM-CHRIST: HOW MUCH GREATER IS THE SECOND ADAM

Clearly in this text, Adam is presented as a type of Christ, but the second Adam brings blessing while the first Adam brings a curse. Our covenant head is either Adam or Christ, and Paul describes here the benefits of being in Christ. Note the lavish language in this passage. He speaks in verse 15 of "the free gift by the grace" of Jesus Christ, and he says that grace "abounded for many." Verse 17 says that we will reign in life because of "the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness" in Jesus Christ. Paul wants us to be astonished and marvel at how great is the grace that is ours through Christ. Adam's sin brought condemnation, but we read in verse 16 that Christ's "free gift" brought "justification." Through Christ we are right with God. We stand before him "not guilty."

If you are an unbeliever today, if you don't belong to Jesus Christ, if you don't trust in him, then you are condemned before God. The only way you can be justified before God, the only

way you can belong to him is if you are in Christ instead of being in Adam. Paul emphasizes this truth in verse 18. Christ's "one act of righteousness" brings justification and life for all. The one act of righteousness in verse 18 probably refers to the atonement Jesus secured by dying on the cross. We can only be forgiven of our sins through the cross of Jesus Christ where he paid the penalty which was deserved for our sin.

We also discover in verse 19 that the one man's obedience made many righteous. It seems fair to conclude from verses 18-19 that Jesus' obedience both during his life and during his death functions as the basis of our justification. It isn't convincing to limit Jesus' obedience only to his death on the cross, for his obedience in going to the cross is inseparable from his obedience throughout his life. Indeed, the one act of righteousness in verse 18 by which he secured forgiveness through his death would not atone for sin if Jesus sinned during his life. Jesus' one act of righteousness, then, includes the notion that he lived a sinless life. We see from these verses that we enjoy forgiveness of sins because of Christ's death. But we also see that the obedience of Jesus is credited to our account. We don't just receive half of Christ. We get all of Christ when we trust in him. We receive forgiveness of sins and his righteousness. What glorious good news is ours in Christ!

Let me unpack what our Lord has done by stating it this way. Our Lord Jesus fulfilled both the penal and preceptive dimensions of the law. In other words, he paid the penalty for our sins and always kept God's commands. And all of that is ours when we put our trust in Christ. We are not only forgiven of our sins, but we are also righteous in Christ.

Let's think then about the practical importance of this teaching. If you struggle with guilt, if you feel like a failure, and all you can think about is your sins, remember that your righteousness is not your own. Your righteousness is found in Jesus Christ. Look outside of yourself to Christ for your righteousness.

If you struggle with assurance of salvation, if you regularly think you don't belong to God because of your sins, look to Christ for your standing before God. Recognize that you are perfect before the Father because you belong to Christ. The Father looks upon you and says, "This is my beloved son. This is my beloved daughter. I am well pleased with you." Look to Christ for your assurance instead of trusting in yourself.

As we bring this message to a conclusion, let me address a theological issue that some people raise in these verses. Throughout church history, some have appealed to these verses to teach universalism, that is, the idea that all people without exception will be ultimately saved. Universalists defend the idea that all will be saved by looking at the parallel between Adam and Christ. Verse 15 says many died through Adam's sin and Christ's grace abounded for many. Universalists say that since the many who died through Adam includes all people without exception, the many to whom grace abounded through Christ must be all people without exception too. They see the same point in verse 19. Just as many were made sinners through the one man, so too the many were made righteous by the one man's obedience. Plus, verse 18 specifically uses the language of "all." Adam's one trespass "led to condemnation for *all* men" and Christ's "one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for *all* men." Universalists think these verses are clear. Just as *all* are condemned through Adam, so *all* without exception are saved by Christ.

What should be our response to this kind of reasoning? It is this: this view is certainly wrong. There are simply too many passages which teach that not all will be saved. Jesus very clearly teaches that it would be better if Judas were not born, and that can only be true if Judas's destiny is hell. If he went to heaven, it would have been better for him to be born! Life would be worth it despite his sin. We also read in Revelation 19 that the beast and false prophet will be thrown into hell, so not all are saved. Plus, even in this text, context is crucial

in our interpretation of it. Romans 5 itself makes it clear that the all and many when used with reference to Christ, do not refer to all people without exception, but only to all those who are in Christ, to those who exercise faith. Look at verse 17, "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." It is only those who *receive* the gift of righteousness who will reign in life. Not everyone is in Christ, but only those who receive the gift of righteousness.

We see the same truth emphasized in a parallel passage about Adam and Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:21-23: "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ." Verse 22 at first glance, just like Romans 5, might seem to support universalism. For it says that all die in Adam and all in Christ shall be made alive. But if we read the verses more carefully we see that universalism isn't taught here. For one thing, Paul limits those who are made alive to those who are *in Christ*. Second, note that verse 23 also shows that Paul doesn't mean all people belong to Christ. For he says that the first resurrection is limited to "those who belong to Christ," but that clearly implies that not all belong to Christ. Paul emphasizes the wide expanse and lavishness of salvation in Christ, but he doesn't teach that all will be saved. Obviously this entails that the Scripture teaches a heaven and a hell, and we must take this very seriously. This point is not a mere debating point; it is a question of life and death and hence the imperative to preach the gospel to our families, in our neighborhoods, in our country, and to the uttermost parts of the world.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

As we bring our exposition to an end, let us finish by asking: What, then, is the purpose of this passage in the context of Romans? Why did Paul write it? Was it merely to focus on Adam and origi-

nal sin, as important as those truths are? Or, was his primary emphasis to stress and underscore our glorious hope in Christ? Obviously, it is the latter. Paul wrote this very important text to emphasize our hope in Christ. He wants us to see the mess that Adam brought into the world. Oh what devastation was introduced into the world by Adam's sin. Disease, death, grief, pain, anguish, and on and on. How many tears have been shed because of human sin. The devastation from sin is so great that we couldn't take it psychologically if we were to understand it right now. We would faint straight away if we truly saw the horror of sin.

So, what a mess has been introduced into the world. You know it doesn't take long to make a mess. I remember when we were in Minnesota some kids got into a high school and they trashed it, and did millions of dollars in damage in a few minutes. Look around this room. We could damage and destroy this room significantly in just a few minutes: windows could be broken, pews turned over, and scratched, and on and on. Even on a smaller level this is true. It doesn't take much effort or time to mess up your bedroom. But it takes much more effort to clean up a mess. It took a few minutes to do millions of dollars of damage to the school, but it took weeks and months to clean it up. It takes a lot more effort to clean up your room than to mess it up.

Here is how great the grace of Christ is. He cleaned up the mess made by our lives. How extravagant is his grace. How vast and wide and deep it is. Is your life a mess today? Do you think it can never be cleaned up? I can't clean it up for you. The elders can't clean it up for you. But Jesus can clean it up. He can make you new. He can restore the years the locust has eaten. He can give you joy so that you sit under your own vine and your own fig tree again. But Jesus did more than just clean up the mess in our lives. Jesus not only forgave our sins, but he also gave us his righteousness.

So, to use our illustration. Jesus did not only clean up the school room. He made the school room better than it was before. He made the school

room shining clean and perfect. Our righteousness is not in ourselves: it is in Jesus Christ. His perfect obedience is ours now because we are united to him. And we have the promise that on the last day we will be completely perfected. All sin will be removed from our lives. Let's think, then, about the practical implications of these verses.

First, the Lord can clean up the messes we have made with our lives. Perhaps you have a relationship with a family member or a friend that is badly fractured, and you think it can never be put back together. But don't lose hope. If Jesus can clean up the mess created by Adam's sin, he can restore relationships that are broken. God doesn't promise that relationships will always be healed. But he is able to bring forgiveness and joy where there is pain and sorrow.

Second, the same truth applies to churches. God can give life where there is death. Perhaps God is calling some of you to an existing church where there is not spiritual life. He doesn't promise that you will experience a revival during your ministry. But he does promise that his word will not return void. No labor in the Lord is in vain. The gospel always bears fruit and increases.

Third, the same truth also applies to missions. Some fields are very difficult. I talked to one Croatian pastor, and he told me that he would be happy if one person were converted during his lifetime. Our church's own missionaries in Croatia aren't seeing lots of converts right now, but they continue to hope and pray for them. And they realize that they may be sowing now and others may reap later. That is true both in churches and on the mission field. Psalm 126 says, "Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him."

Fourth, perhaps you are discouraged and down currently. Perhaps you are in a long season of experiencing a frowning providence. The Lord calls upon us to trust in him during these difficult times. To realize that he gives us trials for

our good. Satan wants us to think it will never get better. Things will always be woeful. Sadness will never pass away. But Jesus promises that sadness will not finally reign in our lives.

The final word is not grief but joy. Tears are not the last word, but laughter is. Ultimately and finally it will be the laughter of our dreams coming true. Now our dreams might not come to pass the way we expected, and the pain of getting there might astonish. But remember that the final word is joy. Weeping may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning.