

This fall we will be restarting our Shepherding Groups,
utilizing the Shorter Catechism in helping us think through the life of discipleship –
in short, how do we live out the obedience of faith day by day?
How do we live the Christian life?
How can we glorify God and enjoy him forever?
What does that have to do with Romans 5?

It just so happens that our catechism quiz this week
is question 16 in the Shorter Catechism:

Q. 16. *Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression?*

A. The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression.

There you have the catechism's summary of one of the main points of Romans 5.
What I will do today is give you an example of what we're looking for
in our shepherding groups this year.

How does the Bible's teaching on original sin
point us toward “the obedience of faith”?

Imagine a spring of cold water, flowing into a green meadow and watering the ground,
giving joy and life to all creatures.

Now, imagine that spring being poisoned--
the water polluted with a deadly acid--
the meadow grows brown and fades,
the trees wither,
and the animals shrivel and die.

That is a picture of the Fall--of original sin.

Man was created to be the steward of all creation;
all creation rejoiced in his rule,
and he was the spring, the fountainhead, of all humanity.

But Adam's sin poisoned the spring--
and now the foul waters of sin and corruption flow through our veins.

When Adam lost the gifts which God had given him,
he lost them not only for himself,
but for us all.

“In Adam I fell,
in Adam I was cast out of Paradise,
In Adam I died.

How shall God call me back except he find me in Adam?
For just as in Adam I am guilty of sin and owe a debt to death,
so in Christ I am justified.” (Ambrose)

Ambrose preached this in Milan more than 1700 years ago.

Are you guilty in Adam?
Did Adam’s sin make you a sinner?

We don’t like to hear this.
How can it be fair for God to condemn *me* for what *Adam* did?
He sinned – and because he sinned, I get a life of misery and corruption.
How is that fair??!!

If you think in terms of modern individualism,
it’s not fair.
If everyone should be judged strictly and solely based on their own merits,
then God is not fair.

But did you hear how I put that?
If you take *our standards*, and judge God according to our standards,
then God is not fair.
But God does not judge according to our standards.

And for that I say, “Thanks be to God!”

Why do I say that?
Because if it would be unfair for God to find you guilty in Adam,
then it would also be unfair for God to justify you in Christ!
If you are not corrupted by Adam’s sin,
then neither are you healed by Christ’s righteousness.

Or, as Ambrose put it:
“How shall God call me back except he find me in Adam?
For just as in Adam I am guilty of sin and owe a debt to death,
so in Christ I am justified.”

Our passage opens and closes by contrasting the reign of death in Adam (v12-14),
with the reign of grace in Christ unto eternal life (v20-21).
And the middle it focuses on two comparisons:
the comparison of the free gift with the transgression (v15-17),
and the comparison of the Trespass of the One and the Righteousness of the One (v18-19)

- 1. The reign of Death through the Sin of Adam (5:12-14)**
- 2. The Comparison, Part 1: “How Much More” will the gift accomplish than the transgression (5:15-17)**
- 3. The Comparison, Part 2: the Transgression of One makes all sinners; the Righteousness of One makes all righteous (5:18-19)**
- 4. The Reign of Grace through Righteousness unto Life, through Jesus Christ our Lord (5:20-21)**

1. The reign of Death through the Sin of Adam (5:12-14)

*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.*

Paul’s point here is to remind us of something we already know:
the reign of Death has come through the sin of the one man – Adam.
As Paul will say in the next chapter,
“the wages of sin is death.”
And through the sin of the one man, death came to all men.

You could summarize Paul’s basic point by saying:
The universal reign of death demonstrates that all sinned in Adam.

After all, sin was in the world before the law was given.
How do we know?
What does Paul mean by “*sin is not counted where there is no law*”? (v13)
The way you know that sin was universal is because of death.
The wages of sin is death.
If people are dying, then you know that they are guilty before God.

That’s why Paul says in verse 14, that death reigned from Adam to Moses,
“even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam.”
Adam’s transgression was a willful violation of God’s law.
And so Adam died.

But from Adam to Moses there was no “law” –
no written revelation from God
that laid down what man was to believe concerning God
and what duty God required of man.
And yet Paul says “sin was in the world before the law was given.”

How do we know?

Because people died.

If people are dying, then you know that sin is in the world!

But someone may ask,

what about a tiny newborn child, who has never had the chance to sin?

How can God say that this infant is guilty?

A child cannot stand before God and protest his innocence,

because in Adam he sinned,

in Adam he died.

Even those who do not violate a specific commandment

(their sin is not like the transgression of Adam),

yet still they sinned in Adam, they are guilty in Adam, and so they die in Adam.

When I look at myself,

and see the depths of my depravity--

my constant craving for power and pleasure,

the ways in which I do good things simply to gain approval--

I know that God's judgment against me is just.

And then I look at you.

If you are half as sinful as I am,

then you are a wretched and miserable sinner,

who is utterly bent on your own selfishness.

--the way you use your tongue,

to flatter one moment

and flatten the next.

You can see it in your children.

You have to teach them how to be kind,

but nastiness and selfishness spring forth

from the moment they come into the world!

And then just look at the world around you!

The carnage in the Middle East,

and the gang warfare in our cities

The plague of AIDS in Africa and America,

The starving children of a thousand generations

crying themselves to sleep with hunger--only to die in the night.

War, plague and famine--

they are truly the curse of God against a sinful people.

All of Adam's race suffers under that curse.

And you have not escaped!

You have faced disease and death in your families;

You have felt the bitter sting of miscarriages,

divorce, or abusive parents or spouses.
You children have lain sick in your beds,
coughing and sneezing--crying for relief.
Is it any wonder that our catechism says
that the sin of Adam brought us into an estate of sin and misery?
God is angry with Adam,
and all of his children.

2. Much More – the Gift Is Better than the Trespass (5:15-17)

But the free gift is not like the trespass.

Paul has just said that Adam is a type of Christ.

Usually when we think about “types” we think about people who are “like” Christ:
we think of King David who was a good king, like Jesus;
or we think of Moses who was a faithful prophet, like Jesus.

But here Paul says that Adam is a type of “the one who was to come”
and then says that *the free gift is NOT like the trespass.*

In other words, the typology here is not parallel, but antithetical.

Adam and Christ are similar ONLY in that they both represent those who are “in” them.
In Adam, I die.
In Christ, I am made alive.

But as you contemplate the depths of your sin,
remember Paul's "MUCH MORE!"
Paul is placing Adam and Christ in parallel--
but the key is in the refrain, "much more"!

Notice verse 15:

*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 Paul says again in verse 16:

*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.*

And in verse 17 Paul returns to the central theme of the passage –
the theme of the reign of death and the reign of grace.

*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.*

Notice how Paul puts this:

through the one man's trespass, death reigned.
But through the one man Jesus Christ, *we* reign in life.
Do you see that in verse 17?

You might think that the parallel would be:
Through one man's trespass, death reigned,
And so through one man's righteousness, life reigned.

But Paul is not saying that Adam and Christ are equals.
No, they are opposites!

Think back to the Garden.

Who was supposed to reign on earth?
Adam and Eve.
They were called to fill the earth and subdue it.
They were called to have dominion (lordship) over the creatures,
and to rule over creation as God's vicegerent.

But through Adam's sin, death reigned in his place.
And so our Lord Jesus Christ has overthrown the power of death,
through his resurrection from the dead.
And now it is not "life" that reigns,
but Jesus Christ, the second Adam who reigns.

*Therefore, those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness
WILL reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*

But Paul is not quite finished explaining the contrast between Adam and Christ.
In verses 18-19 he explains how:

3. The Transgression of one makes all sinners; the Righteousness of one makes all righteous (5:18-19)

How can a just God declare you guilty for Adam's sin?
If God cannot declare you guilty in Adam,
then God cannot declare you righteous in Jesus Christ, who is the 2d Adam
This is the contrast which Paul draws in Romans 5.

Adam is not just anybody,
he is the head of the whole of humanity.

The actions of the head--the "one man"--
have a profound impact on everyone who is in that one man.
So, Adam's sin is not simply his own.

As Paul puts it in verses 18 (and Paul has no verbs in verse 18, so I'll read it without them):
*Therefore, as one trespass unto condemnation for all men,
so one act of righteousness unto justification for all men;*

Adam's ONE sin constituted all men sinners.
So also Christ's one act of righteousness constituted justification for all men.

So does this mean that all men are justified?
No, it means Christ's righteousness constitutes justification for all men.
Do you see the difference?
The only way that *anyone* is justified is if he or she believes in Jesus.
Paul's point here is not that everyone is justified.
Rather, his point is that all men can be justified in exactly the same way:
through the obedience of the one man, Jesus Christ.

As Paul puts it in verse 19:
*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.*

In short, there are only two men in all of history--Adam and Christ.

ADAM: one man's sin----->condemnation---->death for all in Adam
CHRIST: one man's righteousness---->justification----->life for all in Christ

4. The Reign of Grace unto Life (5:20-21)

In verses 20-21, then, Paul returns to the theme he began in verses 12-14:
the theme of the reign of death,
and its relation to the law.

God created Adam to reign in life.
But Adam sinned and handed his kingdom over to Death.
God then re-established his kingdom through giving his law to Moses.

*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.*

Why does Paul bring up the law here?

Paul is retelling the story of redemption from Adam to Christ.
He has already established in Romans 3-4 that God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles,
and that Abraham is the father of all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile.
So what is the purpose of the law?

The purpose of the law was to increase the trespass.

What?!!!

Don't tell me that you've never done this as a parent!!

You want to train your toddler not to go into a certain room,
so what do you do?

You could just put up a barrier that they can't get over –
but that won't actually teach them anything.

So instead you give them a law:

“if you cross this line, you will get a swat on the butt.”

And then you sit there and when that child looks you in the eye
with that “are you really serious?” look
and steps across the line anyway –
you have just increased the trespass!!

You set them up for it!!

But why?

Your purpose was not to make their lives miserable,
but to teach them a valuable lesson –
the importance of listening to the voice of their father.

And as Paul says, God's purpose in giving the law
was not only to increase the trespass,
but also that “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”

In this way the purpose of the law was to cause us to despair of our own efforts.
My efforts cannot produce righteousness.
By the works of the law no flesh will be justified.

*So that as sin reigned in death,
grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The law came in to teach us not to trust ourselves, but to put our trust in Jesus!

Now, grammar is important.

Verb tenses are important.

Have you noticed the verb tenses of the word “to reign”?

verse 14 “death reigned”

verse 17 “death reigned”

verse 17 “those who receive the abundance of grace will reign”

verse 21 “sin reigned”

verse 21 “so that grace might reign”

Over the next two weeks we will see in Romans 6 how Paul will flesh out the implications of this.

But for now I will simply point out
that the reign of sin and death is over.

Sin and death *reigned* –

but they no longer reign!

Those who are in Christ *will* reign,

but we do not *yet* reign.

What is it that reigns now?

Grace.

Through the one act of righteousness – the death and resurrection of Jesus –
the free gift of righteousness has come to those who believe in Jesus,
so that as sin reigned in death,
grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Conclusion:

At the beginning of the sermon I asked how our doctrine of original sin
helps us think about the obedience of faith.

When you go to work tomorrow, why should you be thinking about how we all sinned in Adam?

As you get ready for school,

why should you be thinking about the reign of death and the reign of grace?

Three things:

1) If you are in Christ, then the reign of sin and death is ended.

This is Paul’s own application in Romans 6.

If you have been united to Christ,

and if you have died with him,

then you **are not** under the power of sin and death,

but rather, you are under the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Sin is not your master--so do not let it master you.

Death has no more authority over those who are in Christ,

than it does over Christ himself.

Do you believe that?

If you do, then how you speak and how you think tomorrow
will be shaped by the dominion of grace.

- 2) If you understand that you have died with Christ,
then you need to put to death all that belonged to your Adamic nature.
This is where Paul goes in Romans 8

But where do you start?

Let me put it this way,

if you are standing in front of a dam with a hundred little holes in it,
is it going to do any good to simply stick your finger in one of them?

That would be like putting a band-aid on a severed artery.

It won't work.

Sin is like that reservoir:

it may only show itself in these little trickles on the surface of the dam,
but there is enough water back there to destroy the whole dam.

Even so,

sin may only show itself in little trickles on the surface of your life,
but there is a mass of sin within you,
large enough to destroy your whole life.

You can try to deal with one sin at a time,

but another one will always take its place.

You can eliminate one sinful habit,

but there are three more which were hiding behind it!

But I do not counsel despair.

Rather, I want you to see how big your God is.

You've been thinking too small.

God is not in the business of repairing dams,

he is drying up the whole reservoir of sin and misery!

And in Jesus Christ that is exactly what he has done.

Don't think small,

think bigger than you've ever dreamed before.

Don't just tackle sins--the little trickles which come through the dam--
you need to tackle sin--the whole reservoir!

The only way to put to death the deeds of the flesh,

is to fix your hearts and minds upon your Savior,

the source of living water who brings life to the dead!

You are no longer defined by Adam's one act of sin,

Rather, you are defined by Christ's one act of righteousness--
his death and resurrection.

And finally

- 3) You need the grace to persevere in your struggle against sin.

That is why we come to the Lord's table today.
Jesus Christ offers you himself in the Supper,
as the medicine of immortality.
And as you feed on him in your hearts,
with faith and with thanksgiving,
remember that you are no longer a slave to sin and death,
because you participate in his death--
as Paul says in I Corinthians 10:16
"is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks
a participation in the blood of Christ?
And is not the bread that we break
a participation in the body of Christ?"

And anyone who has participated in the death of Christ,
has died to sin,
and has the promise of eternal life.

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.

Let us pray.

TH 519 "Fountain of Never-Ceasing Grace"