



Sermon Notes | Death and Life: Part III | Romans 5:12-21

INTRODUCTION

This portion of the letter of Romans has been contrasting the humanities, the 'humanity of death' and the 'humanity of life'. The 'humanity of death' is in Adam, created in Adam, thus present in the Garden with Adam, as Adam stood in the Garden as our 'representative'. Thus, in the Garden all humanity sinned, and therefore, from that point onward 'death reigned' in all humanity. 'Death' is the 'default' for humanity, but it is not necessarily the 'terminus' for all of humanity.

The 'humanity of life', that is, 'humanity in Christ', is a humanity comprised of all those who 'receive' the gift, the grace, the righteousness, the abundance of the 'new humanity'.

Romans 5:17

"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."

Those who 'receive' have the gracious gift of Christ. He is the 'head', the new 'representative' of the 'humanity of life'. He stands for those in Him. He stands as their 'representative'. This is the 'humanity of life'.

Those in Christ: this is what is counted. Counted: By the grace of Christ.

Romans 5:15

"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 free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many."

Justification: Right standing before God in the wake of many trespasses.

Romans 5:16

"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."

Grace Reigns: Grace reigning in life through Christ Jesus.

Romans 5:17

"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 free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ."

The contrast between the 'humanity of death' and the 'humanity of life' is now brought to a head.

Romans 5:18

"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men."

And so Paul provides a 'recap' and a 'closing emphasis' as we look at the full passage.

Romans 5:12-21

"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.

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 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. 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."

Through Christ, our Lord, by way of the Holy Spirit, we ask for instruction, and being changed, be willing to apply what You have taught us. Amen.

Verses 18-21 provide a snapshot, a part, of the whole situation. Through one man, Adam brought 'condemnation', and 'disobedience', and the 'reign of death'. Through one Man, Christ brought 'justification', and 'obedience', and the 'reign of life'. All of us reside under one of these 'humanities'. Either Adam is your 'head', or Christ is your 'head'. Only these two choices exist. Cease and consider your own 'humanity' through these verses in Romans 5 as we consider the 'humanity of life'.

I. THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST: (vv 18-19)

Romans 5:18

"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men."

In one sense, Paul is restating/referring back to verse 16. The same essence holds.

Romans 5:16

"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."

There was one action for judgment, one trespass that led to 'condemnation', and judgment was rendered: A 'guilty' verdict over 'Adam's humanity', which became 'the reign of death'. But the free gift proved different. The One Act of 'righteousness' conversely leads to 'justification', and 'the reign of life'. This was a legal pardon, a 'not guilty', for all in Christ's 'humanity', and a granting of 'righteous standing' before God.

Verses 16 and 18 are pulling out the same message, but there is further detail to be considered.

First, we note that on both sides, Adam's and Christ's, the references refer to 'all men'. On one side, Adam's trespass led to condemnation of 'all men', without exception. All of 'humanity' was condemned because 'all men' are found 'in' Adam, 'in the Garden' as Adam sinned. We understand this. But how does one Act of Jesus lead to 'justification' and life for 'all men'? Does this mean that all men, without exception, will receive 'justification and eternal life'? Is this verse teaching universal salvation? No. That would be heretical. But is it saying that we will all be okay in the end? Some believe so, some theologians, some lay people, even some church people. But this heresy is false teaching, false thinking, even if it makes us feel better. We want to believe this verse makes it all okay; we want to believe this is so. But the problem is that this is only one verse. Yet the Bible states in many other places that we are not all okay, that in the end, mankind is not okay. Jesus Himself stated that not all will be okay in the end. In fact, He tells some to 'depart' from Him because they are not known to Him.

Matthew 7:21-23

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'."

The book of Daniel states that all will rise from the dead, some to everlasting life and others to contempt. Not everyone is okay.

Daniel 12:1-2

"At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

And closer to home, we note the Book of Romans which states 'for the wrath of God' is revealed because of the 'suppression of truth'.

Romans 1:18

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

And judgment of God rightly falls on those who are unrighteous.

Romans 2:2

"We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things."

The whole world will be held accountable before God. This is not God letting us off for our sins. This is not meant to be a 'feel good' situation. 'All men' will not be okay even though we want it to be so.

Romans 3:19

"Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God."

The word "all" in the Word always has a context. The peace of God is not known to "all". Right standing before God is not attained by "all".

Romans 3:17

"... and the way of peace they have not known."

There is a 'limiter'. Only 'only those who receive' the free gift, the abundance of grace. There is a condition, a boundary for this 'humanity in Christ'. Limitation exists!

In Adam, all 'humanity' has sinned and faces 'death'. This is the one boundary, the default boundary.

Romans 5:12

"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."

But in Christ there is a different boundary. Christ defines His boundary by 'all who receive' His free gift of grace.

Romans 5:17

"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."

Not all are in Abraham. Abraham was a man of faith, and so also must we be. Gaining the 'righteousness' of God comes by 'faith' in Christ Jesus. This must be 'received' and 'believed'.

Romans 4:3, 16

"For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.'

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring --- not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all."

And so we have a clarification of the context. Two humanities exist, one 'in Adam' and one 'in Christ'.

Romans 5:18

"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men."

But given this, we must read 'correctly', not 'conveniently'. Adam's action brought only sin and death. Christ's action was 'different'. Christ's action was an act of 'righteousness'. Christ's action was the gift of Christ. It was more than one act in a life; it was a whole life given, a whole person invested. Christ's death was one act of 'righteousness', the culminating act being that He gave His very life, His whole life, to this capstone action. Christ's purpose in coming to earth, the very incarnation, was that He came to complete a whole act that no one else could accomplish. He came to die, yet His dying wasn't just 'helpful'. His dying was an act of 'righteousness' and an act of 'submission'. Christ took on humanity, took on human flesh, and in 'obedient submission' to the Father's Will, willingly gave up His life and died. This was an act of 'righteousness'.

Our attitude should match that of Christ's example, 'obedience' to God, simply because of who He is.

Paul uses the incarnation to point out Christ's condescension in humility, how He, in the form of God Himself, emptied Himself, and took on flesh and a servant's heart. He did not give up being God, but took on more. (Subtraction by addition!) He added humanity, flesh and servanthood, and became obedient even unto death. Such was the 'death of Christ'.

Philippians 2:5-8

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

'The death of Christ' was the capstone of His obedience. It accomplished the 'atonement' that bought our salvation. One aspect of His obedience was that it was a 'passive obedience'. Christ received His death willingly, laid down His life willing, submitting Himself passively and willingly to the penile demands of the Law. He died in the place of 'sinners', taking on the penalty and punishment of death that they deserved. This was the purpose of 'the cross' that Christ would become the cornerstone of our redemption and salvation. Yet, if that was all that Christ accomplished, it could have been considered a 'restart' situation, but in fact, more happened still. He not only paid the price of the penalty, which He did, not just by a 'passive' laying down of His life, but it was also an 'active' action.

Romans 5:19

"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."

Jesus not only gave His life, because a penalty needed to be paid, but also because a 'perfect life' was needed in order to meet the penalty demands. But Adam had one law that was 'revealed' to him, and he transgressed that one law and made many sinners. By his transgression of that one law, he imputed guilt onto all humanity, and as a result, all humanity following remained in sin.

This is key:

Adam transgressed one 'revealed' law and imputed all humanity sinners.
Christ, the new Adam, came later, after the whole Law was given; His life 'articulated' the whole Law.

Jesus speaks to His disciples about the Law lived out in His 'Sermon on the Mount' in Matthew, chapters 5-7. Christ had come after so much of the Law was revealed. Man was to 'obey' this Law, but there was a problem. Man could not deal with one law, and was unable to deal with the whole Law.

Man could not deal with 'one law' yet Christ was able to keep the 'whole Law'. Man was to 'obey' the Law; Christ came to fulfill the 'whole Law'.

Matthew 5:17

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Even as a child, Christ 'obeys' his earthly parents.

Luke 2:51

"And he (Jesus) went down with them (Mary and Joseph) and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart."

Christ explains that He came to earth 'to do' the Will of the Father, God. This is His priority. 'My life is a matter of 'submission': a whole life of 'actively' obeying The Father!'

John 4:34

"Jesus said to them (the disciples), 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work'."

Later on, Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, in prayer to His Father, where He submits His will, His Ministry, His life, to the Will of the Father. 'Not My will, but Yours be done!'

Matthew 26:39

"And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will'."

This is 'whole life' obedience; a life of 'obedience', even the obedience of death.

Philippians 2:8

"And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

A 'whole life' was given by Christ, a life laid down. The Old Testament prophet paints the picture of love, the groom for his bride; Christ gives His life for us! And in doing so He 'imputeth righteousness' and our salvation.

Isaiah 61:10

"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness; as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."

His 'act of obedience' was not just 'merciful', but gives 'righteousness' to us His children. This was 'active obedience'.

II Corinthians 5:21

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

For our sake He became sin so that we could become righteous. He died for us, but also gives us 'righteousness in Him'. He died for us, but more, He gave us a standing of pardon before God.

Romans 5:19

"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."

Yes, there is a 'future sense' to this, but there is also an experienced and 'lived now' aspect as well. There is 'joy' now. We consider Christ's prayer at the end of His life, before the Cross.

John 17: 1-5

"When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed'."

'Eternal life' is now! On the eve before the Cross, Christ speaks of 'accomplished work' in the past tense. This is before the Cross has even happened. He purchased our 'righteousness'. His was a whole life of 'obedience' capped with the Cross. We need a 'righteousness' that does not just 'reset' us, but a 'righteousness' that 'satisfies us to God', not just in terms of 'legal demands', but that satisfies the life demands of the Law. We need to be made right with God, and to be brought to satisfaction with God, through the 'obedience' of Christ.

II. THE GRACE THAT IS CHRIST: (vv 20-21)

Romans 5:20-21

"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."

Paul returns to the Law here to amplify his point. Adam 'transgressed' 'one' law. Christ 'perfectly' 'obeyed' the 'whole Law'. Therefore, Law came in to 'increase the trespass'. Imagine what Adam would have done with more law. We know what he would have done. He did not 'obey' one law. And we can look at the 'bigger picture' and consider Israel itself: Israel, God's 'chosen' people; Israel, the recipients of God's Law by Moses. How did they fare? How did they make out? The Law increased their trespasses. Sin amplified their sin. Their sin was against the 'revealed Law', therefore became more transgression. It led to many trespasses. The Exodus account demonstrates how this unfolded, on the cusp of 'receiving' the very Law. And Paul speaks to his own experience with the Law.

Romans 7:7

"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'"

1. The Law came in and made sin to be known as sin.
2. The Law revealed/showed to Paul his sin, and amplified it.
3. The Law revealed the 'seriousness' of sin.

We read further that 'death' was the most common penalty for sin. Scripture is filled with examples:

The cursing of parents, meant death to those guilty.

Exodus 21:17

"Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death."

The result of adultery would result in both the man and woman being put to death.

Leviticus 20:10

"If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death."

Breaking the Sabbath law by picking up logs/sticks was punishable by death.

Numbers 15:32-35

"While the people of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation. They put him in custody, because it had not been made clear what should be done to him. And the LORD said to Moses, 'The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp'."

Idolatry was also to warrant death.

Deuteronomy 13:6-9

"If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife you embrace or your friend who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods', which neither you nor your fathers have known, some of the gods of the peoples who are around you, whether near you or far off from you, from the one end of the earth to the other, you shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him. But you shall kill him. Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people."

Sin is still sin, even without the Law. There was sin from the time of Adam to that of Moses. But the Law makes sin more 'grievous', more weighty. That is what makes it a transgression!

But what of us? We are tiny Adam and Eves. We don't get it right with more moral law. We, indeed, get it wrong. And we do not get better with more attempts at keeping the

Law. We cannot 'obey' the Law. The Law amplifies the sin in our lives, and we are helpless in our ability to 'obey'. The Law 'amplifies' the dire situation that we are in, and we sin all the more.

The Law was given to increase the trespass! How discouraging is that? But there is further 'encouragement'. Grace abounded more! Paul's point: No matter how much sin there is, sin can never ever outrun 'grace'. Sin cannot overtake 'grace'. 'Grace wins for the repentant, every time! Grace runs further, and abounds more.

Romans 5:20

"Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased grace abounded all the more."

Prophet after prophet gave messages addressing 'abounding sin/compounding sin'. The messages of Isaiah, Amos, Micah, Ezekiel: all establishing the truth about sin increasing, yet there was 'grace abounding' also; 'hesed', a Godly, abounding and steadfast love that included merciful action meant to help the one in need. Thus was the story of Hosea, whom God called to take a prostitute as a wife; a parable demonstrating the relationship between God and Israel, with Israel being the unfaithful wife.

Hosea 2:7-19

"She shall pursue her lovers but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but shall not find them. Then she shall say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me than now.' And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal. Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand. And I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts. And I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, 'These are my wages, which my lovers have given me.' I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall devour them. And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the LORD.

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband'; and no longer will you call me 'My Baal'. For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy."

Thus the faithless wife is pictured, groping for anyone but God. Yet the marriage is not over. God has not forgotten His covenant with Israel. He will punish the unfaithfulness. He will remove 'bits of happiness'. I will take them away, Israel. I gave them to you, even though you forgot Me. We might expect that God would just give up on Israel, that there would be no 'recovery' of their relationship. But God goes on. His love and faithfulness are sure and unchanging. His actions of mercy and discipline bring Israel back to Himself. He draws her back, and 'speaks tenderly to her' and repentance happens. He emphasizes His commitment in verse 19: "I will betroth you to me forever." You shall know the LORD. "I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy." (vs 19) Between sin and judgment, the LORD's grace abounds. I will "speak tenderly to her" (vs 14) Israel has sinned, but this very sin demonstrates God's grace towards Israel.

We see the same happening in Romans. The same purpose exists for us in the same way. God's grace abounds.

Romans 5:21

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

'Grace' - the free gift, the favour of God on the undeserving. Sin reigns in death, but 'grace' reigns through Christ's righteousness. It is no longer 'death' reigning, but 'grace', leading to eternal life, in Christ Alone! Under the 'new headship' in Christ, 'grace reigns'. It starts and ends with Christ!

Romans 5:1

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Romans 5:21

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

Through one man, Adam, came sin. Through Christ, came justification, and justified, we are made right before God. Our sufferings lead to hope. By ONE man we are pardoned and made righteous. It is a transfer. Through one man we move from death to new life. Only in Christ is there life: nowhere else. Everything else leads to death in Adam. Yes, we feel the sting of sin. Yes, we feel the sting of death in our life. Yes we struggle, and are worn down, and continue to transgress. We are the authors of our own destruction. But in Christ, Adam is no longer our 'head'. We have a 'new head', a new master. In Christ we still are a 'slave', but in Christ we have a 'new life', and we can never be moved from it. We are complete in Him.

Adam's humanity was awful. It was 'death', but it was reversible. That 'humanity of death' does not have to be permanent. It can be changed. But no one can remove us from 'righteousness in Christ'. It is irreversible. Though we still struggle, we are complete, secure,

and never to be moved, ever. We must ever be reminded of this fact, both in word and in song. May we be renewed in this truth. Amen.