

54. The Book of Romans 5:12-19

Paul's Epistle to the Romans
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

(5-29-24)

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In our study in Romans, we have currently entered into the final section of the second major division of the book—a section that runs from 3:21-5:19. This section is dealing with the doctrine of '**Justification**' (salvation).

We are currently in chapter 5:12-21 where Paul is presenting a section dealing with—'*The Basis for our Justification.*'

The Basis for Our Justification—verses 5:12-21

Romans 5:12 (NKJV)

¹² Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—

The Bible teaches that sin brought 2 kinds of death into the world. The *first* and most obvious kind of death that sin brought into the world is *physical* death. Although, when Adam (and Eve) sinned against God—he didn't experience physical death immediately—but his sin did set in motion the *process* of physical death (entropy) the moment he sinned—

Genesis 2:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." [the Hebrew reads: "*Dying you shall surely die*"]

The *second* kind of death that sin brought to mankind is *spiritual* death.

Let me stop and define death—death is *separation*.

Physical death is when the *soul* (the consciousness) is separated from the body—and spiritual death is when the *soul* is separated from God.

Spiritual death is what Paul was referring to in Ephesians 2 when he said—

Ephesians 2:1-2a (NKJV)

¹ And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked...

Jesus mentions both *physical* and *spiritual* death when talking to Martha over the death of her brother Lazarus and his resurrection—

John 11:25–26 (NKJV)

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die [physically], he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die [spiritually]..."

Spiritual death (separation from God) in the Lake of Fire (hell) is called the 'second death' in Revelation 20:

Revelation 20:11, 13–15 (NKJV)

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away...
¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

One author summed it up this way—

“The unregenerate are very much alive to the world, but they are dead to God and to the things of God. Spiritual death, then, is when the consciousness is separated from God. If this death is not replaced with resurrection life through the new birth (salvation), it will result in what is referred to in Scripture as the second death (Revelation 21:8). The eternal consequence of being separated from God through the sin of Adam is the second death. This death is not only separation from God but also eternal torment in hell.

The unbeliever has reason to fear these two deaths, but neither should be feared by believers. They are saved permanently by Christ from spiritual death and the eternal punishment that goes along with it. And their physical death (or rapture) will usher them into His divine presence. For believers Christ has removed the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14, 15).”

I think it was D.L. Moody who put it this way—*“Believers in Jesus are born twice and die once—whereas unbelievers are born once and die twice.”*

Romans 5:12 (NKJV)

¹² Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, **and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—**

Death was passed down to all Adam’s descendants because they had all sinned in him.

Paul’s point is that—Adam’s sin was a *representative act*—which means that all his descendants are reckoned as having sinned in him. The fallen human nature of man is not the *result* but the cause of man’s sinful acts—or in other words, sinning doesn’t *make* a person a sinner—he or she sins because they are sinners—by nature.

Every person who is not spiritually born-again through Jesus Christ (John 3:3) is born into this world with a fallen sin nature and as a child of the devil—Jesus told the Pharisees—*“You are of your father the devil...”* (John 8:44).

As we have already mentioned, some object to the idea that they sinned *in Adam*, arguing that— they not only were not there but did not even exist when he sinned—so why are they being held accountable for Adam’s sin?

One pastor responded—

*“Well, by the same token, we were not physically at the crucifixion when Christ died, but as believers we willingly accept the truth that, by faith, we died with Him. We did not literally enter the grave with Christ and were not literally resurrected with Him, but by faith we are accounted to have been buried and raised with Him. If the principle were not true that **all sinned** in Adam, it would be impossible to make the point that all can be made righteous in Christ.”*

Romans 5:12–14 (NKJV)

¹² Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus 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 to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

One author said with regard to this—

“How do we *know* that we are racially united to Adam? The answer is in Romans 5:12–14, and the argument runs like this:

‘We know that all men die. But death is the result of disobeying the Law. There was no Law from Adam to Moses, but men still died. A general result demands a general cause. What is that cause? It can be only one thing: the disobedience of Adam.’

When Adam sinned, he ultimately died. All of his descendants died (Genesis 5), yet the Law had not yet been given. Conclusion: they died because of Adam’s sin. “For that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12) means “all have sinned *in Adam’s sin*.”

Let me illustrate what the author is saying—imagine back then that a husband and wife couldn’t pay a debt they owed and so they were sold into slavery to pay that debt. While they were slaves, they had several children born to them—all of those children would be born slaves even though they themselves did nothing to make themselves slaves.

This is exactly what happened to all of Adam’s children (descendants)—when he sinned against God and became the slave of sin, Satan, and death—even though we, as Adam’s descendants, didn’t commit the original sin that caused us to be slaves—we were born into slavery because of Adam’s sin.

“How do we know that God is holding us all responsible for Adam’s sin?”

Paul answers that by pointing out that death still reigned from Adam to Moses—even before the Law was given:

Romans 5:13–14 (NKJV)

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 to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

Again, fallen men and women don’t die because of their own *acts* of sin—otherwise, babies would not die (Romans 9:11)—they die because they are *racially* united to Adam (“in Adam all men die”—1 Corinthians 15:22).

One author put it this way—

“The apostle points out that before God gave the Law on Mount Sinai, sin was already in the world. But men’s failure to meet the standards of the Law was not imputed against them because during that period they had no law. Yet, because death reigned from Adam to Moses, that is, death was universal even though there was no law, it is obvious that men were still sinful. It was not because of men’s *sinful acts* in breaking the Mosaic Law, which they did not yet have, but because of their *sinful nature* that all men from Adam until Moses were subject to death.”

Adam is “**a type of Him who was to come (Jesus)**” in several ways: 1) *Both were completely sinless men from the beginning.* 2) *Both did things that had consequences for all mankind.*

In verses 15 through 21 Paul is going to be making 5 contrasts.

1. He begins in verse 15 by contrasting the—transgression of man in Adam with the gift of God in Christ.

Romans 5:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ **But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.**

The first contrast is between the offense of Adam and the free gift of Christ. With regard to the offense (trespass) of the first man (Adam)—the word “**many**” is literally “the many” and means the same as “**all men**” in Romans 5:12 and 18.) “**The many died**” refers, of course, to Adam’s descendants (death here may include *spiritual* as well as *physical* death).

“...much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.”

“**Much more**” here shows that Jesus Christ did not only cancel the effects of Adam’s sin, but He provided more than Adam lost or even possessed before the Fall, namely, the righteousness of God and an inheritance waiting for us in heaven someday.

Wiersbe—

“Because of Adam’s trespass, many died; because of Christ’s obedience the grace of God abounds to many bringing life....Note the “much more”—for the grace of Christ brings not only physical life, but also spiritual life and abundant life. Christ did conquer death and one day will raise the bodies of all who have died “in Christ.” If He stopped there, He would only reverse the effects of Adam’s sin; but He went on to do “much more.” He gives eternal life abundantly to all who trust Him (John 10:10).”

2. He continues in v.16 by contrasting—condemnation with justification.

Romans 5:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ **And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification.**

Here is another important contrast between Adam’s **sin** and Jesus’ **free gift**. Adam’s sin brought **condemnation** (judgment)—but Christ’s work on the cross brings **justification** (salvation).

Romans 6:23 (NKJV)

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

One commentator provides some important insight into what Paul is saying—

“This verse contains two very practical truths that are closely related. The first is that God hates sin so much that it took only one sin to condemn the entire human race and separate them from Him. It was not that Adam’s first sin was worse than others he committed or worse than men have committed since—it was simply that his first sin was sin...

In the same way, any sin that any man has ever committed would be sufficient to damn the whole human race, just as Adam’s one sin did. A sobering thought, indeed.

The other truth in verse 16 is still more amazing and incomprehensible and is as heartening as the first is sobering. Greater even than God’s hatred of sin is His love for the sinner. Despite the fact that God hates sin so much that any one sin could damn the human race, His loving grace toward man is so great that He provides not only for the redemption of one man from one sin but for the redemption of all men from all sins.

Jesus Christ took upon Himself the sins of the whole world. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19).”

3. In verse 17 Paul contrasts the reign of death with the reign of life.

Romans 5:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

The key to understanding verse 17—is to emphasize the word ‘**abundant**’ in the phrase “*God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness.*”

The thought that those who have been thus abundantly blessed are enabled to reign in life now through Jesus—or to put it simply, the work of Christ in dying for us did not merely restore us to the position in which Adam stood before the fall, but rather carries us beyond that.

One commentator said,

“Those redeemed by the death of Christ are not merely recovered from the fall, but made to reign through Jesus Christ, to which they had no title in Adam’s communion. In Adam we lost our kingship, but in Jesus Christ we reign as kings—and we reign “much more”! Our spiritual reign is far greater than Adam’s earthly reign, for we share “abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness” (Romans 5:17).

John 10:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

4. In verses 18-19, the contrast is between the disobedience of Adam (mankind) with the obedience of Christ.

Romans 5:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment came* to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life.

At this point, Paul anticipates that his readers would be thinking to themselves—“*How can one man’s death bring salvation to the whole world?*” And the answer is—“*The same way one man’s disobedience brought condemnation to the whole world.*”

Please don’t let Paul’s statement—“**through one Man’s righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life**” lead you to believe that Paul is teaching universalism—he’s not.

One commentator had this to say—

*“Just as “**the many died**” in verse 15 refers inclusively to all men, so “**life to all men**” here refers exclusively to those who trust in Christ. This verse does not teach universalism, as some have contended through the centuries. It is abundantly clear from other parts of this epistle, including the first two verses of this chapter, that salvation comes only to those who have faith in Jesus Christ. (1 Timothy 4:10; 1 John 2:2)”*

Romans 5:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

Paul's primary teaching in these two verses is that the essence of Adam's **one transgression** (verse 18a) was **disobedience** (verse 19a), whereas the essence of Christ's **one act of righteousness** (verse 18b) was **obedience** (verse 19b).

One scholar—

“When God commanded Adam not to eat of the forbidden fruit, Adam disobeyed and brought death. When God sent His only begotten Son into the world to suffer and die, the Son obeyed and brought life.

From beginning to end, Jesus' earthly life was characterized by perfect obedience to His heavenly Father. Even at the age of twelve, He reminded His parents that He had to be about His Father's business (Luke 2:49). Jesus' sole purpose on earth was to do His Father's will (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; cf. Matthew 26:39, 42). In His incarnation, 'He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross' (Philippians 2:8)”

As a Christian you can look at this passage in an allegorical way representing the two natures you have as a Christian—the old nature in Adam, and the new nature in Christ.

The old nature wants you to disobey God, do your own thing so that it can lead you into sin and destroy your walk with God.

The new nature wants you to obey what God has said so as to lead you in righteousness and blessing.

Galatians 5:16–17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Someone has said, *“Two natures beat within my breast, the one is foul, the one is blessed. The one I love, the one I hate, the one I feed will dominate.”*

5. In verses 20-21, the contrast is between law and grace.

Romans 5:20a (NKJV)

²⁰ Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound...

How did the law increase sin?

1. *The law increased sin by increasing our knowledge of it, by defining it for us.*
2. *The law increased sin by convicting us of sin, showing it to be an offense against God.*
3. *The law provoked us to sin more, thereby revealing sin's true nature.*

All of this opened us up to God's grace.

Romans 5:20b (NKJV)

²⁰ Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. **But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more...**

The Greek word translated, **“abounded much more”** is a little difficult to translate into English with just a word or two.

The word means “*super-increased*” or “*super-abounded*” and pictures unending, overflowing grace—a grace that knows no bounds.

- The New English Bible—“*Where sin was thus multiplied, grace immeasurably exceeded it.*”
- J.B. Phillips paraphrases it—“*Though sin is shown to be wide and deep, thank God His grace is wider and deeper still.*”
- Another translates it—“*Where sin reached a high-water mark, grace completely flooded the world.*”

One commentator explains it this way—

“The idea is that of an overflowing, as if a mighty flood were let loose, sweeping everything before it. Indeed, we might well use the term ‘engulfed’; such an abundance, such a super-abundance that it drowns and engulfs everything.”

Let me put into simple terms, God’s grace to forgive is always greater than the sin you’ve committed no matter how terrible it is—and because God’s grace is infinite, it’s inexhaustible.

Romans 5:20–21 (NKJV)

²⁰ Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, ²¹ **so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Let me illustrate these two verses through the life of one man.

One of the ministries we support as a church is the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago, which serves as a ministry to the men and women on skid row in the heart of the loop. This old man is called “*the miracle of skid row*”—his name was Bub Harris.

“From his early 20’s till he was 71 he lived on skid row. He was considered to be the worst of the worst of all those who lived there.

He was a wicked, filthy, blasphemous old sinner who they said was mean as a snake, rotten through and through.

His story goes back to the beginning of the Pacific Garden Mission, which was founded by Col. Clark and his wife back in 1877.

Bub Harris lived alone in a dark, filthy hall bedroom in a dilapidated boarding house. He never cleaned it. Those who saw it said it was filthy beyond description. Roach infested, walls black with dirt, woodwork sticky and greasy from years of neglect.

The filthiest pictures imaginable adorned the walls; boxes were stacked to the ceiling. Piles of dirty clothes, newspapers and pornographic magazines filled the room. Along the walls rows of empty whiskey bottles ran around the room 5 deep. On top of his dresser there were decks of greasy playing cards, poker chips and dice, along with the 25 or 30 wallets he had picked from people’s pockets.

Old Bub Harris was about as big a reprobate as there ever was. They said that evil wasn’t second nature to him, it was first nature.

When he wasn't drinking or gambling, he liked to amuse himself by going down to the Mission 2 or 3 nights a week to mock and laugh at the singing and preaching and whatever else went on.

This went on for 22 years. And night after night Col. Clark and his wife prayed for him and tried to talk to him about the Lord Who alone could save him and set him free from the power of sin that had such a tremendous hold on him.

Then one day after drinking all night, he staggered into a bookstore and bought a N.T. He went back to his filthy room, he called home and dropped into bed. The N.T. fell open on his bed and he looked down to read these words,

"Thou fool, this night thy soul is required of thee..."

The words infuriated the old man, and he threw the book across the room in a tirade of obscenities. He began kicking empty whiskey bottles and newspapers across the room.

When he finally settled down those words kept ringing in his ears, *"Thou fool, this night..."* was all he could remember. He knew it had something to do with his soul.

Frantically he searched the room to find where he had thrown the New Testament but when he found it, he couldn't locate the verse. So, he sat down on his bed and started reading from the beginning, determined to find that Scripture again, even if it took all day.

So, starting with the genealogy of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Matthew, he began to read. He read about the birth of Jesus Christ, His baptism, the calling of His disciples and the beginning of His public ministry.

He read about His love for sinners, about the miracles He did on their behalf, healing the sick, casting out demons from those who were possessed, and inviting them to come to Him to have their sins forgiven and receive eternal life.

He read about Jesus' death and resurrection and the many other things recorded concerning the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Hour by hour he read, painfully tracing each line with his dirty finger word by word. Until he finally came to Luke 12 where in verses 20 & 21 he read these words,

'But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.'

Suddenly the realization of how much God loved him dawned in his heart along with how badly God wanted to save him from the hell he was living in now and the one that was surely coming.

He ran down to the Mission and when it came time for the invitation he didn't just raise one hand, he waved both of them.

Mrs. Clark ran to his side and walked him to the altar, rejoicing that after 22 years their prayers for this man had been answered.

That night Bub Harris knelt and prayed...

When he was finished he began to jump for joy. He ran back to his filthy room and scrubbed it clean because he said Jesus had made him clean.

From that night on for the last 8 years of his life, as much as the old Bub Harris had hated God before, the new Bub Harris loved God now.

He was loved by everyone he came in contact with and he was given the nickname “Sunshine Harris.”

Night after night he told his story at the PGM. And night after night one man after another who had known him before his conversion came forward to receive Sunshine’s Lord saying, *“If Jesus could save and change old Bub Harris, I want Him to do the same for me.”*

Mr. & Mrs. Clark said that they believed Sunshine Harris’s transformation to be one of the most remarkable in the history of the PGM.

I think that when God used Paul to write the words in the book of Romans, “ **But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more...**” He had in mind men and women like Bub Harris.

And if God’s grace is sufficient to save the worst of us, surely His grace is sufficient to save the rest of us!”

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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