

Lesson 53 at StudyRomans.org

Romans 5:14, Continued

Romans 5:14 — 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.

When we ended last week, we had finished looking at the first part of verse 14, and we had started looking at the second part: “Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, **even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam.**”

What does that second phrase mean? I think what it means is that Adam had a lot more in common with Moses than did most everyone else who lived prior to Moses. And why is that? That is because Adam, like Moses, was given specific commands by God to follow.

Adam did not have to rely on some vague work of the law written on his heart as we saw in Romans 2:14. Instead, God had spoken directly to Adam and had told Adam what he must not do. But then Adam did it. Adam disobeyed a specific law that he had received directly from God. And, again, that is like Moses, who also received a specific law directly from God — and who also broke it.

So we might expect death to reign over Adam, but what about everyone else? What about all of those other people prior to Moses — those who had never heard anything directly from God. Did death reign over them? And the answer, of course, is yes, it did.

Paul has already told us all about it in Romans 2:14-15. They might not have had a direct law from God, but they had all been created by God. They all had the work of the law written on their hearts. They all knew that some things are wrong, and they all did those things anyway. None of them had any excuse. They had all sinned, and so they would all perish absent something being done about it (Romans 3:23-24).

So, yes, their sin was not like the transgression of Adam. God had never given them a direct command that they disobeyed. But they still were guilty of transgression. They still did things that were wrong, and they knew those things were wrong because God had written it on their hearts. And so death also reigned over them. That is Paul's point in verse 14.

But Paul is not finished. He adds something else at the end of verse 14 — "...Adam, **who was a type of the one who was to come.**" What does that mean?

The end of verse 14 explains Paul's entire discussion here. Paul is telling us about Adam to teach us something about Jesus, who, of course, is "the one who was to come" at the end of verse 14. Paul tells us that Adam was a **type** of Christ. What does that mean?

If you grew up in the church and if you remember what life was like before the Internet, then you have certainly heard your fair share of sermons on the types and antitypes in the Bible. The **type** is a pattern that comes first chronologically, and the **antitype** is the counterpart or corresponding reality to that earlier pattern that appears or is fulfilled later in time.

- The Passover lamb is the type, and Jesus is the antitype.
- Jonah in the fish is the type, and Jesus in the tomb is the antitype.
- Noah's ark and the flood are the type, and baptism is the antitype.

And we could give many more examples. We don't hear those terms "type" and "antitype" much today, but we certainly once heard them a lot. And maybe we should start preaching about them again because they can be very instructive, as Paul is demonstrating in Romans 5 with yet another example: Adam is the type, and Jesus is the antitype.

Why is Paul making this comparison with Adam? I think there are at least five reasons.

- First, Paul wants us to understand that the problem of sin and death did not begin with Moses and the law of Moses. Instead, the problem of sin and death began with Adam, long before Moses.
- Second, Paul wants us to understand that our problem is not that we broke the law of Moses, but instead our problem started long before we even had the law of Moses. Yes, there was a law in the garden, but that law was not the law of Moses. And yes, people lived under a law after the garden and prior to Moses, but again, that law was not the law of Moses. Yes, the law of Moses identified sin and condemned sin. The law of Moses even increased sin, as Paul will tell us in verse 20. But the law of

Moses did not create sin. Sin was already in the world long before the law of Moses was given.

- Third, Paul wants us to understand that the great contrast is not between Jesus and Moses but rather is between Jesus and Adam. Adam brought something into the world that affected everyone who followed him: sin and death. But Christ brought something into the world that overcame what Adam brought: Jesus brought grace, righteousness, truth, and life. That is why Paul wants us to look back before Moses. If our problem began with Moses, then maybe all we need is a better law. But our problem did not begin with Moses. Our problem began with Adam, and so the answer to our problem is not another law. Instead, the answer to our problem is another man. And that man is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
- Fourth, Paul wants us to understand that all of our racial and ethnic boundaries fall away as soon as we understand our common connection with Adam. That is not true about Moses, but it is true about Adam. And remember what we saw in the introduction to Romans — the church in Rome had started out entirely Jewish, had gradually become both Jewish and Gentile (with the Jews as leaders), had almost overnight become entirely Gentile, and then had once again gradually become both Jewish and Gentile (this time, with the Gentiles as leaders). That history had created a great deal of tension between the Jews and the Gentiles in the church at Rome — and a major focus of this letter is to address that tension. Paul is doing that right here with this focus on Adam. Both Jews and Gentiles have the same relation to Adam — as they both have the same

relation to Christ. Yes, the Jews may have had an exclusive claim to Moses, but no one has an exclusive claim to Adam.

- Fifth, Paul wants us to understand that the action of one can have consequences for many. Adam's sin did not just affect Adam. And likewise, Jesus' act of righteousness did not just affect Jesus. Adam's sin brought death and sin to the entire world, and Jesus' perfect sacrifice brought grace, justification, righteousness, truth, and life to the entire world. In each case, the action of one affected the entire world.

I think we can see that theme very clearly in the key words on the Handout for Lesson 52 from last week. Which key word or phrase was the biggest in the word cloud on the left side of that Handout? Which word or phrase appears most often in these verses? "One man." That phrase appears nine times in nine verses. Paul's theme here is one man versus one man — Adam versus Christ — what Adam did versus what Jesus did. What we lost with Adam versus what we gain with Christ.

Paul's entire argument here is based on his desire to relocate the starting point for everything that followed. The starting point was not Moses or the giving of the law of Moses, but rather the starting point was Adam. That was where our problem started. That was where the separation from God occurred. That is where death entered the scene and sat down on the throne.

And the solution to that problem? Again, it is not Moses. The solution to the problem caused by the one man Adam is the perfect sacrifice of the one man Jesus, the Son of God. Neither the problem nor the solution is Moses or the law of Moses. The problem was not just a

Jewish thing, and likewise the solution is not just a Jewish thing. The problem came through Adam; the solution came through Christ.

Romans 5:15-17

Romans 5:15-17 — 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. (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. (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.

The reason we are looking at these three verses all at the same time is shown on the Handout for Lesson 53. There is something very unusual about these three verses involving the word “gift,” and, to see what that is, I think we need to first look at these three verses as a unit.

What is Paul doing in these three verses? The answer to that question is simple because Paul just told us what he is doing in these three verses. At the end of verse 14, Paul said that Adam was a type of Jesus, and so, in these next three verses, Paul explains how that is true. How is Adam a type of Christ? Verses 15-17 give us an answer to that question — the trespass of Adam can teach us something about the grace of Christ.

But, as we said, there is something very unusual about Paul's explanation here. As we can see from the Handout, Paul refers to the "free gift" five times and to the "grace" of God three times in these three verses. But — and here is the unusual part — Paul does that using four different Greek words from two different Greek word families. You can see all of those Greek words and word families at the bottom of the Handout.

And we previously looked at these words back in Lesson 36. Let's quickly review what we said in that earlier lesson.

- The Greek noun *charisma* (Strong's #5486) appears six times in Romans, where it is translated "gift" once (1:11), "free gift" three times (5:15; 5:16; 6:23), and plural "gifts" twice (11:29; 12:6).
- The Greek noun *charis* (Strong's #5485) appears 24 times in Romans, where it is translated "grace" 21 times, but in Romans 4:4 that same word is translated "gift." (It is twice translated "thanks.")
- The Greek noun *dorea* (Strong's #1431) appears twice in Romans (5:15; 5:17), where it is translated "free gift."
- The Greek noun *dorema* (Strong's #1434) appears only once in Romans (5:16), where it is translated "free gift."

Three of those four words are always translated as "gift," while the fourth word ("grace") is translated that way at least once. What that means is that, in these three verses, Paul uses four different Greek words that can each mean "gift."

Our first question is immediate — why is Paul using so many different words for the same thing? The short answer is emphasis. Paul is emphasizing the word “gift” because of its importance and because of the great contrast that Paul is describing here.

And what is that contrast? It is the contrast between something we receive as a gift and something we receive as our wages. It is the contrast between something we are given because we earned it and are owed it versus something we are freely given.

We saw that contrast in the previous chapter:

Romans 4:4 — Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.

And Paul will still be telling us about that contrast in the next chapter:

Romans 6:23 — For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Three chapters! Four different Greek words! I think what that tells us is that Paul’s point here is crucial. I think it tells us that Paul’s point here is foundational to everything else that Paul is telling us, and that it is of the utmost importance to Paul himself. I think what it tells us is that, if we miss this point, we will likely miss everything else that Paul is telling us.

Paul wants us to understand something about the grace of God, and Paul wants to make sure that we do not misunderstand what he is telling us. And what is it about the grace of God that Paul wants us all to know? I think it is the same thing that we sometimes sing about:

Wonderful grace of Jesus, greater than all my sin -
how shall my tongue describe it?
Where shall His praise begin?
Taking away my burden, setting my spirit free;
for the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.

I think that song answers our question. What is it about the grace of God that Paul wants us to understand? It is simply that the grace of God is more wonderful than we can ever describe or ever imagine. Paul tells us that fact very plainly elsewhere.

2 Corinthians 9:15 — Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

But wait a second — is God's grace really all that wonderful? I mean, after all, hasn't Paul already described God's grace just as some sort of accounting gimmick? Yes, we owe God a debt, but God just counts that sin as something else to balance the books.

Yes, we have seen Paul using accounting language when it comes to faith being counted as righteousness — but, no, the grace of God is not just some sort of accounting gimmick. The grace of God is not just some way to balance the books. And Paul tells us that right here.

Look at the words that Paul uses in verse 15 — “much more” and “abounded for many.” God is not just zeroing out our account. Instead, Paul is telling us that the free gift of grace goes far beyond the trespass. The free gift is not like the trespass! An accounting gimmick would be easily expressible — but the gift of God's grace is inexpressible! Yes, counting is involved, but God's grace is infinitely more than just counting.

So why is Paul using four Greek words for “gift” in verses 15-17? He is not describing four gifts, but rather he is describing one gift in four ways. Paul is walking around that wonderful gift of God’s grace and describing it from different angles. He wants us to get some appreciation for just how wonderful that grace is. Yes, the gift is inexpressible, but maybe if we use four different words for “gift” we might be able to better see just how wonderful it is. I think that is what Paul is doing here — he is trying to express the inexpressible! (And, of course, when I say that Paul is doing this, I am saying that the Holy Spirit is doing this through Paul’s pen.)

I mentioned a moment ago that Paul’s focus on grace is likely an indication of just how personally important this grace was to Paul himself. And I think we see evidence of that elsewhere in his letters.

If we looked for a key word that carries across all of Paul’s letters, the key word might be this word “grace.” The word “grace” appears 124 times in the ESV New Testament, and 64% of those occurrences are in the epistles of Paul. Paul talks about the grace of God in every one of his epistles.

But why was grace so important to Paul? We know the answer to that question because Paul repeatedly tells us the answer to that question.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 — For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the **grace** of God I am what I am, and his **grace** toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the **grace** of God that is with me.

1 Timothy 1:13-14 — ...though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the **grace** of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 1:13,15 — For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ... But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his **grace**...

Yes, Paul accomplished great things for the kingdom of God, and yes, Paul suffered great things for the kingdom of God. But does anyone think that Paul for even a moment ever thought that he had earned his salvation? We know he did not, and one reason we know that is because of what we see right here in verse 15 — Paul knew that his salvation was a free gift from God. Paul did not receive the grace of God as wages, but rather Paul received the grace of God as a gift that was freely given to him by God.

And this was all very personal for Paul. We just read about it, but look again at what we read from 1 Timothy 1:14 — “the grace of our Lord overflowed **for me**.” That is Paul describing God’s grace in his own life, but doesn’t it sound like what we see right here in verse 15? “The free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ **abounded for many**.” God’s grace overflows! God’s grace abounds! No one understood that better than Paul. Paul was living proof of the wonderful grace of God, and he never stopped talking about it.

When I think about Paul's personal view of God's grace, I am reminded of an event from the life of Christ — an event that involved a Pharisee, just like Paul had been.

Luke 7:36-47 — One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven - for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."

Just think about that final phrase for a moment: “he who is forgiven little.” And then think about how Paul described himself.

1 Timothy 1:15 — The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Paul saw himself as the chief of sinners. Paul knew that he had been forgiven — not little — but much! And we know that, as a result, Paul loved much! We don’t know whether Simon the Pharisee learned that lesson, but we certainly know that Saul the Pharisee learned that lesson! He who is forgiven little, loves little! He who is forgiven much, loves much!

And what about me? What about you? Forgiven much or forgiven little? I think we all know the answer to that question — and I suspect we all have the same answer! We have been forgiven much! And so how, then, should we all view the grace of God? We know how Paul viewed God’s grace. How do we view that grace? Paul never quit talking about it. Is that true of us? Paul loved much! Is that true of me?

Now that we have a big picture of what Paul is doing in these three verses, let’s look a bit more closely at the details.

First, what does Paul mean in verse 15 when he says that “many died through one man’s trespass”? That “one man,” of course, is Adam (as we are told in verse 14), but what does it mean that many died through Adam’s trespass?

To help us answer that question, let’s ask another question: who are these “many” who died? I think looking at the Greek text would help us answer that question, but (as we did once before) we can instead

simply use the Young's Literal Translation for a better window on the Greek than we find in the ESV translation:

Romans 5:15 (YLT) — But, not as the offence so also [is] the free gift; for if by the offence of the one **the many** did die, much more did the grace of God, and the free gift in grace of the one man Jesus Christ, abound to **the many**;

Note the translation there — we do not just see “many” (as in the ESV), but instead we see “the many.” There is a definite article in front of the word translated “many” in the Greek text, but the ESV fails twice to translate that word.

But what does that tell us? What is the difference between “many” and “the many”? I think what that tells us is that Paul is talking about everyone here — the great mass of mankind. “The many” includes everyone who is accountable — that is everyone who has died spiritually because of sin.

But whose sin? That is the million-dollar question here. Whose sin? Did we all die spiritually because of Adam's sin or did we all die spiritually because of our own sin? Some look at verse 15 and say the answer is Adam — but didn't Paul already give us the answer to that question back in verse 12 when he said that “death spread to all men because all sinned.” Spiritual death did not spread to me because Adam sinned. Spiritual death spread to me because I sinned. That is what Paul told us in verse 12.

But what then does verse 15 mean? What does Paul mean here when he says that “the many” died through Adam's trespass?

As we so often do, let's start with what it does not mean. Whatever verse 15 means, it does not mean that I am being punished for the sin of someone else. God tells us repeatedly that he does not do that.

Deuteronomy 24:16 — Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin.

Ezekiel 18:4 — Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

Ezekiel 18:20 — The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

“The wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.” Or, stated another way: “Death spread to all men because all sinned.” That is how God operates. That is how God has always operated.

And here is where we really need to focus on the difference between something that is a punishment for sin versus something that is a consequence of sin. There is a difference there, although sometimes that difference is hard to see for those who are suffering because of that sin.

Think, for example, about the great flood. Was that great flood sent as a punishment for sin? Yes, we know that it was.

Genesis 6:13 — And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled

with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.”

But was everyone who died in that great flood being punished by God because of their sin? No. Why not? Because we can be certain that many children died in that great flood. They drowned right alongside their parents.

Were those children being punished for sin? They were not. We know they were not. They were not being punished for their own sin because they had no sin, and they were not being punished for their parents’ sin because of the verses we just read telling us that God does not punish us for the sin of someone else.

But were those children suffering as a consequence of their parents’ sin? Yes, they were. Their parents sinned, and their children suffered as a consequence of the punishment inflicted on their parents because of that sin. And, again, that distinction might be lost on the one who is drowning in the flood waters, but that distinction is not lost on God. God, the righteous judge, knows the difference.