

Lesson 54 at StudyRomans.org

Romans 5:15, Continued

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

Last week, we looked at verses 15-17 at a high level so that we could see how Paul is using four different Greek words to describe the free gift of God's grace. Then we went back to verse 15 so that we could study each of those verses at a more detailed level.

And the question about verse 15 that we ended with last week was this: what does Paul mean when he says that the many died through Adam's trespass?

We know that physical death spread as a consequence of Adam's sin — we saw that in Genesis 3. But the death here is spiritual death.

This death in verse 15 is the death that is dealt with by the free gift of God's grace. This death is the death that comes from my own sin. This death is the death that, as we will see in the next chapter, causes me to be dead when I am lowered into that watery grave of baptism. This death in verse 15 is spiritual death.

But then does that mean that spiritual death, like physical death, is also a consequence of Adam's sin? I think it does. Read the verse again: "many died through one man's trespass." Yes, my spiritual death is a punishment for my sin, but also yes, my spiritual death is in some way a consequence of what Adam did.

But how? How is my spiritual death a consequence of what Adam did? I think the answer to that question comes immediately once we step back to see what Paul is doing in this chapter — he is contrasting Christ with Adam. And what is the greatest contrast? It is that Christ gave us life while Adam gave us death.

Yes, I die spiritually because of my own sin — but who opened that door? Who was it who first heard the law of God and then decided to break that law? It was Adam.

Our spiritual death comes through Adam when we follow the example of Adam. We, like Adam, hear the law of God, and we, like Adam, decide to break that law. When we do that, we are choosing Adam over Christ. We are following the example of Adam rather than the example of Christ. That is how we die spiritually through Adam's trespass. We follow Adam's bad example.

And there is something about this contrast that we must not miss — it is not new. This great contrast between life and death is the same contrast between faith and law that Paul has been making all throughout the beginning of this letter. It is the same contrast between salvation through what we did versus salvation through what Jesus did that Paul has been describing. Life versus death; faith versus law; wages versus grace. That is all the same contrast — and it is a contrast between Christ and Adam.

But was that really true of Adam? Was Adam really trying to go out on his own and do things by himself? Yes, he was. Just listen to what Satan promised Eve.

Genesis 3:4-5 — But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it **your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God**, knowing good and evil.”

“You will be like God.” “Your eyes will be opened.” That is not trust in God. That is not reliance upon God. That is not faith in God. Instead, that is the opposite. That is taking the place of God. That is trust in your own wisdom and your own abilities. That is the path you take when you don’t think you need God. That is not the path of faith. That is the path you take when you plan to save yourself by your own efforts. And that path is the path of Adam.

So what path am I on? The path of Adam or the path of Christ? The path of law or the path of faith? The path of what I do for myself or the path of what Christ did for me? The path of death or the path of life? The path of condemnation or the path of salvation? The path of sin or the path of righteousness?

In short, am I **in Adam** or am I **in Christ**? In the very next chapter, Paul will tell us how to be in Christ. But where are we as sinners before we do that? We are in Adam. Everyone is either in Adam or in Christ. There is no other option.

When the law of God meets the will of man, the result is sin and death. That was true of Adam, and it has been true of everyone after Adam who follows the example of Adam. And the solution is not more law. Instead, the solution is the free gift of God’s grace. That is what Paul is telling us here.

Let’s now look at the end of verse 15: “much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ

abounded for many.” What does that mean? Does “much more” mean many more people? Does “many” mean that many will be saved? No to both questions.

“Much more” does not mean a greater number. “The many” for whom grace abounds is also “the many” who died through Adam’s trespass. Those two groups are the same group.

We are not seeing a different number or a different scope. Instead, what we are seeing with the phrase “much more” is a different quality. It is what we mentioned before — God did not just cancel our debt like an accountant might draw a line through it. Instead, God did something much more than that. Remember how verse 15 started — “the free gift is not like the trespass.” Instead, it is “much more!” It abounds for the many!

But is it really **many**? Does the grace of God really abound for many? I thought only a few would be saved? Isn’t that what Jesus told us?

Matthew 7:14 — For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are **few**.

Yes, sadly, we know that few will go through that narrow gate. But, happily, the gift of God’s grace abounds for “the many.” The gift of God’s grace abounds for all. The Bible tells us that here, and the Bible also tells us that elsewhere.

Titus 2:11 — For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for **all** people.

John 1:14 — And the Word became flesh and **dwelt among us**, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, **full of grace** and truth.

God sent his Son to save the world. And God's will is that everyone be saved (2 Peter 3:9). But that is not the world's will. That is not the will of most people, and so most people will be lost. But that fact is not a limitation on God's grace (as Calvin teaches) but rather it is because of man's rebellion and man's refusal to obey the gospel of Christ and so receive the free gift of God's grace that is offered to all.

I mentioned Calvin. Am I saying that Calvinism somehow limits the grace of God? Yes, that is what I am saying because that is what Calvinism does — it limits the grace of God.

Think back to the TULIP we mentioned in a previous lesson. As we recall, the word TULIP is an acronym for the five tenets of Calvinism, and, as we also recall, the first petal, "T" for Total Depravity, did not survive verse 12.

Does Calvin really limit the grace of God? Well, what does the "L" in TULIP stand for? **Limited**. That third tenet of Calvinism is Limited Atonement, which is the false belief that God's grace was never meant for those who were predestined for Hell.

That certainly answers our question as to whether Calvinism limits the grace of God! The "L" in TULIP stands for limited! Calvin's view is that the grace of God was always intended only for the elect. Calvin teaches that God's grace was never intended for or available to the non-elect.

Now, let me ask a question about that central tenet of Calvinism — does it sound anything like verse 15? The answer, of course, is no, it does not. Instead, verse 15 is the exact opposite of that false view.

“The many” who died through Adam’s trespass are the same “many” for whom the free gift of grace abounded! And the word is “many” — not “few.”

That word “many” confirms that Paul is not just talking here about the saved, but is instead talking about the whole world — all who sinned, and all for whom Jesus died to make God’s grace available to all. There is nothing “limited” in verse 15! There is nothing limited about the grace of God! Let’s read it again from Titus.

Titus 2:11 — For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for **all people**.

That is the opposite of what Calvin teaches. And what that means is that two petals have fallen off Calvin’s TULIP in the span of four verses! And, as we will soon see, another petal or two will hit the floor before we leave Romans 5. The bloom is off that rose for sure!

Romans 5:16, Continued

So far, we have looked at verses 15-17 at a high level, and we have looked at verse 15 at a more detailed level. Let’s now also do that for verse 16, and let’s begin by reading it again:

Romans 5:16 — And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one tres-

pass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

Verse 15 told us that the free gift was not like the trespass. Verse 16 tells us that the free gift is also not like the result of that trespass. And then Paul explains why that is true — one results in condemnation, while the other results in justification. That is where each choice leads. If you choose Adam, you get condemnation. If you choose Jesus, you get justification.

But we do have a question. Paul says, “for the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation.” What is that judgment?

We have several possibilities, but I think Paul narrows it down for us. This judgment in verse 16 followed one trespass, which we know from the context was Adam’s one trespass. And I think that Adam’s one trespass here must have been Adam’s first trespass. This is the judgment that came from Adam’s first sin. “For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation.”

And what was that judgment? God told Adam all about it.

Genesis 2:16-17 — And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 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.**”

Was that physical death or spiritual death? We know it was not physical death. Why? Because Adam did not physically die on the day that he ate of that tree.

But Adam did die on that day — Adam died spiritually. God told him that “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die,” and that is what happened. Adam sinned, and Adam died that same day. He died spiritually. The judgment in Romans 5:16 following that one trespass is the judgment in Genesis 2:17 — “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

And that same judgment has fallen on everyone after Adam who, like Adam, has been accountable to the law of God and has broken that law. Like Adam, each such person has surely died — and every such person remains spiritually dead absent Christ. It is only in Jesus that anyone can be raised to walk in newness of life, as Paul will soon tell us.

What was true of Adam was true of me and was true of you — one trespass brought condemnation. One sin is enough to separate us from God for all eternity. Yes, there was one such trespass with Adam, but there are many such trespasses when we consider all who came after Adam. And, in fact, that is what Paul does in the second half of this sentence in verse 16.

For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, **but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.**

The judgment came after one trespass — either the first sin of Adam or the first sin in our own lives — but the free gift is different. The free gift comes after many trespasses! And, once again, Paul is telling us about the wonderful grace of God!

The grace of God is not just a get-out-of-jail-free card that we keep in our pocket. The grace of God is not a free pass that we can use only

once. The grace of God is not a mulligan. Yes, **one sin** condemns us — but the grace of God covers **many sins**! For a faithful child of God, the grace of God covers not only that first sin, but every sin that comes afterward.

1 John 1:7 — But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from **all sin**.

Now let's talk about the timing. And, yes, another petal from Calvin's TULIP is about to hit the ground!

The second petal, "U," stands for Unconditional Election, and it is the false teaching that God chose specific people for salvation before the creation of the world and that God chose others for eternal damnation before they were ever born — all without any condition on what they would do after they were born.

What would the timing be under that view? Well, the judgment under that view would have happened before I was ever born and before I ever committed any trespass. So that means that the timing under Calvin's view would have the trespass follow the judgment, and it would also have the trespass follow my receipt of the free gift of God's grace. Calvin tells us that both the judgment and the free gift of grace happened before any of us were ever born — before we ever did anything. So under Calvin's timing, my trespass must come after my judgment and after my receipt of the free gift of grace — depending on whether God chose me for the A Group or the B Group.

But is that the timing we see in verse 16? No, it is not. Look at the verse. "For the judgment **following** one trespass brought condem-

nation, but the free gift **following** many trespasses brought justification.” That is the opposite of what Calvin teaches.

Paul is telling us that the judgment of God happens after we sin and that the free gift of God’s grace is given after we sin. Not before we sin, as Calvin teaches, but after. I am not born condemned, but rather I am condemned after I sin. And if I am saved from that sin, that free gift of grace also happens after the sin itself. Both the judgment for the sin and the free gift of grace that forgives the sin follow the trespass — just as verse 16 tells us.

So what does that mean? What it means is that another petal of Calvin’s ungodly TULIP has hit the ground! That is three petals on the ground in only five verses! (And, of course, we know that none of his petals is true. Each of Calvinism’s five tenets is false — as we will see again shortly.)

Romans 5:17, Continued

So far, we have looked at verses 15-17 at a high level, and we have looked at verses 15-16 at a more detailed level. Let’s now do that for verse 17, and let’s begin by reading it again:

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.

We have already talked about what Paul tells us in the first half of verse 17. Death reigned through Adam because of Adam’s trespass.

When Adam sinned, death entered the scene and sat down on the throne. That was why God commanded Adam not to eat of that tree — so that Adam would not surely die. But Adam did eat, and Adam did die — not physically on the day that he ate, but spiritually on the day that he ate. And, of course, he also died physically on a later day.

And what about those who came after Adam? What about us? Absent God doing something about it, we would be in the same boat as Adam. Like Adam, we also have a law from God. Like Adam, we also broke that law from God. Like Adam, we also died spiritually on that day when we first sinned. And like Adam we would all be subject to the reign of death. That is where we would all be had God not done anything about it.

But God did do something about it. God sent his only begotten Son to die on a cross and to conquer the grave. God sent Jesus to dethrone death.

Hebrews 2:14-15 — Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

“Those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.” That verse is describing people who are living under the reign of King Death!

But King Death is no longer reigning. Jesus is King — and Jesus, through death, destroyed the one who had the power of death. That was a change of kingship — and it is the same change that Paul is

telling us about in verse 17 — death reigned through Adam, but that reign has come to an end.

2 Timothy 1:10 — And which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Yes, but what about what Paul tells us elsewhere?

1 Corinthians 15:25-26 — For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

What does that mean? Death has been abolished, but death has not yet been destroyed? How do we explain that?

Simple. Paul explained it in the verses we just read. “For he must reign” — that is the reign of Christ. Jesus is reigning as King of kings, which means that Jesus is King over everyone and everything. We do not obey Christ to make him King; we obey Christ because he is already King. That is what the phrase “King of kings” means — it means that he is everyone’s King.

And death? Death is described in that verse from 1 Corinthians 15 as an enemy of the King. That verse is not describing the **reign** of death, but rather that verse is describing the **rebellion** of death. And like all enemies of Christ, death will be put under the feet of Christ and destroyed. But, as Paul tells us, death will be the last enemy of the King to suffer that fate. “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

And we know that is true because we can see that it is true. People continue to die — both physically and spiritually. Yes, death has been

dethroned. But death continues to operate — not as a king, but as an enemy of the King — as an enemy of Christ that operates in rebellion against Christ, who reigns as King.

And make no mistake about it — death has been defeated. The power of death has been abolished by the power of the gospel. Yes, we still die spiritually when we sin, but Jesus raises us from that spiritual death when we come up out of that watery grave of baptism. And, yes, we still die physically, but there is a great day coming when Jesus will raise us from that physical death. The reign of death is over. Jesus is reigning as King.

And, yes, we know all of that is true because that is what the Bible tells us, but that is not precisely what this verse tells us. Yes, Jesus reigns as King, but this verse does not say that, at least not directly. Instead, verse 17 says that **we** reign through Christ. “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.” What does that mean? Is Jesus reigning, or are we reigning?

The answer, of course, is both because the Bible tells us the answer is both. We know that Jesus is reigning as King. But then how do **we** also reign through Christ? What does that mean?

Paul uses a future verb to describe this reign — but future to what? If it is future to the reign of death in Adam, then this verse could be saying that we are reigning now in some sense. If, instead, this future verb is future to the time of Paul, then perhaps this verse is describing our reign on the last day — which is certainly something we see elsewhere.

1 Peter 5:4 — And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

So which is it? Now or later? Perhaps the verse gives us a clue with the phrase “in life.” Verse 17 does not just say that we will reign through Jesus, but the verse instead says that we will reign **in life** through Jesus. And, given the context, I think we are looking at spiritual life here and now, just as we have also been looking at spiritual death here and now in this same discussion.

In what sense can those who have been raised to walk in spiritual life be said to reign through Christ? I think the answer is simple — we reign through Christ and with Christ because we are members of the royal family! And again, that is not because we are *physically* alive — that is because we are *spiritually* alive! We were once spiritually dead, but we have now been raised to spiritual life (Romans 6). That is when we were added to the household of God and became members of the royal family (Acts 2).

Whatever we decide about our reign in life, the key thing for us to notice is the word “life.” That is the contrast in this verse — a reign that involves death versus a reign that involves life. That is the great change that happened when Jesus removed death from that throne and reigned instead. Jesus changed the reign of death into the reign of life. That is what Paul is saying here, and, of course, Jesus also told us that.

John 14:6 — Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, **and the life**. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 11:25-26 - ...“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” ...

Adam gave us death. Jesus gives us life. Adam brought the reign of death. Jesus brought the reign of life.

And who enjoys that reign of life? Paul tells us right here. It is for “those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness.” It is for those who have obeyed the gospel of Christ. It is for those who are saved through faith in Christ. It is for those who are spiritually alive.

And when does that change occur? We know when we die spiritually. Paul has already told us that. We die spiritually with our first trespass. But we also know that condition of spiritual death need not be a permanent condition. We know that the gospel is the power of God to raise us from spiritual death to spiritual life. Paul has already told us all of that.

But Paul, I still have a question. What is the precise point in time when I go from spiritual death to spiritual life? When does that happen? Paul will answer that question in the very next chapter. Paul will tell us the precise point in time when we are raised to spiritual life from spiritual death. But, for now, let’s move on to the next two verses, which are difficult.

Romans 5:18-19

Romans 5:18-19 — 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.

Verses 18-19 are difficult for the same reason, so I think it is best for us to consider them together. And what is that difficulty? It is Paul's statement about "life for **all** men" and his statement that "the **many** will be made righteous."

Is Paul teaching universal salvation in these two verses? Some have reached that conclusion. Here, for example, is what one commentator says:

"Common to all these passages is that all-powerful grace is unthinkable without eschatological universalism and that cosmology overshadows anthropology as its projection."

Yes, I, too, remember when I got my first thesaurus! But I wish that commentator would put down his thesaurus and pick up his concordance instead! I think that if he did that, he would have a better understanding of the grace of God. That commentator is saying two things about the grace of God, neither of which is correct.

What does he mean when he says that "all-powerful grace is unthinkable without eschatological universalism"? What he means is that if God's grace is really all-powerful, then it must be true that everyone will ultimately be saved. If Adam's sin had a universal effect, then Christ's righteousness must also have a universal effect. If anyone

is ultimately lost, then doesn't that mean that God's grace is not all-powerful?

That is what he is saying, and, of course, what he is saying is wrong. But, despite being wrong, his statement is understandable given his starting point.

What do I mean? What I mean is that if, as Calvin teaches, the grace of God is irresistible, then it must be true that either everyone will be saved or that God's grace is limited in its scope. If we start with the false premise that God's grace is irresistible, then we must arrive at one of those two false conclusions — either everyone will be saved or God's grace is not available to all people. Calvin chose the latter false conclusion, while this commentator has chosen the former false conclusion. But both conclusions are false, and their premise is false — God's grace is not irresistible!