

How Can One Man Affect So Many?

Romans 5:12–21

Studies in Romans #22

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Paul's theme in Romans is that the gospel is "the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes" (1:16). And from 3:21 through 5:21 he explains to us why the gospel is so powerful to save. The answer is because when we believe in Jesus we are declared to be righteous and acceptable to God. This leads to another question of why? Why does what Jesus did two thousand years ago affect me? That's an important question. It's the kind of question we deal with everyday in our lives. How is it that slave traders four hundred years ago still affect how we view each other in our society? How is it that what my dad did or didn't do still affects how I live?

To answer this Paul says **therefore** (v. 12) and takes us all the way back to 1:18 and our sin as well as to 3:21 and our righteousness. So what he does is make a parallel between Adam and Jesus. Adam was God's son in the Garden; Jesus is the eternal Son in human flesh. One was placed in an upright world; the other came to a fallen world. One was in paradise; one was in the wilderness. One was tested by a tree; the other hung upon the

tree of the cross. One was disobedient; the other was obedient. One brought condemnation; the other brought justification. One brought death; the other brought life.

You see, as you've heard me say so many times before, you cannot understand the good news God has in store for you unless you first understand the bad news you deserve. "I agree, but knowing this is really important for new believers, right?" Brothers and sisters, the gospel is like oxygen. If you don't breath it in, the blood in your body will not be able to feed all the parts of your body and you will die. You need oxygen to live. The gospel is the oxygen of your soul. Without it, you will die! How many fads and trends come and go in the church all to attract unbelievers? I just saw the latest in trying to make Christianity "relevant" by tapping into the craze over Star Wars. And a church sign said, "A long time ago, in a Galilee far, far away..." All the while, Christians are suffocating!

The Principle of Oneness (vv. 12–14)

So how can one man affect so many? First, in verses 12–14 we see *the principle of oneness*. The reason Adam's one sin affects all humanity is not because everyone has sinned like Adam, but because of the principle of

oneness in Adam, what we sometimes call “federal headship.” As we say, “In Adam’s fall sinned we all.” Notice how Paul proves this.

First, he summarizes Genesis 1–3 by saying **sin came into the world through one man**, meaning Adam. Just like our leaders represent us for good or bad so too Adam represented us as the first man. Paul Simon was wrong we he sang, “I am a rock. I am an island.” Then he says **and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned**. So there’s Adam’s sin and the resultant universal death. His one sin is the door of death for the world. But then he adds this strange phrase **because all sinned**. Let me come back to that.

Second, Paul moves forward from Adam to Israel in verse 13: **for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given**—he’s speaking of Mount Sinai—**but sin is not counted where there is no law**. Let me illustrate what he’s saying. If there is no law for speeding and no sign saying, “Speed Limit 25,” and then as I go 55 an officer pulls me over, he can’t tell me I broke the law. On the other hand, when there is a fence saying, “No Trespassing,” we’ve been warned! The time between Adam and Moses had no posted signs stating God’s laws to the world. As we saw in chapter 2 the Gentiles had the law on their hearts, but there was no publicly stated and

posted law like there was with Adam. But Paul points out in verse 14 that despite there being no law everyone still died: **Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam.** For example we read of the generations from Adam to Noah in Genesis 5 with that sad refrain, “And he died.” Why was everyone dying when it was Adam who sinned? There is no clearer explanation than Adam’s one sin being imputed to the accounts of every human being. And that takes us back to that strange phrase **because all sinned.** How does Adam’s sin affect me? Because in Adam as my father and representative I am accounted as a sinner.

“But why I am liable for Adam’s sin?” The answer is what is called imputation. Adam’s sin was imputed to us in the same way that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us. We experience this everyday. For me, my wife works, earns money, and has that automatically deposited into our joint account. I benefit from her work because the money she earns is credited into my account. Note that in Paul’s dose of reality about our liability for sin in Adam he hints at good news: Adam **was a type of the one who was to come** (v. 14). As one hymn says, “Man’s work faileth, Christ’s availeth.”

The Principle of Greatness (vv. 15–21)

And that leads to a second point about *how can one man affect so many?* Second, in verses 15–21 we see *the principle of greatness*. We see this principle that what Jesus does for us is greater than what Adam did to us: **But the free gift is not like the trespass** (v. 15). How so? Notice the first comparison: ***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.*** One man, Adam, trespassed the law, and brought death to all he represented; but how much more does the one man, Jesus Christ, bring grace to the many he represents?

Then again in verse 16 he says, **And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin.** How so? Notice the second comparison: **For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification** (v. 16). Adam's **one trespass** of the law brought **condemnation**. How terrible is that! But Jesus' **free gift** brings us **justification**. Justification in Christ is stronger than condemnation in Adam! And then he says it again in verse 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.

Death reigns over the world in Adam but life reigns in Jesus Christ because he gives us righteousness! This is why the funeral of the unbeliever is so sad and tragic despite the world's attempts to make it a happy celebration of life!

But in Christ we reign over death in our death and in the life to come because we go to be with the Lord. As we sang Christmas Eve:

*Adam's likeness, Lord, efface,
Stamp Thine image in its place:
Second Adam from above,
Reinstate us in Thy love.*

Then Paul summarizes for us in verses 18–19 with another **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. Imagine two columns in which Adam and Jesus are the headings. Under Adam we read: “disobedience, condemnation, death.” Under Jesus we read: “obedience, justification, life.” Adam's sin is like a cancer that affects all our cells unto death. But in Jesus, every cancerous cell is replaced by life-giving cells unto eternal life. Adam's original sin as well as every single sinful thought, word,

and deed we've committed is replaced by the obedience of the one man, our Lord Jesus Christ! As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Jesus is greater than Adam. And grace is greater than the law. That's what Paul says at the end in verses 20–21: **Now the law came in to increase the trespass.** Remember 3:20? "By the law comes knowledge of sin." Then comes the "much more" principle of grace: **but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more**—better, "super-abounded"—**so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

This is how one man can affect so many. One man's sin, another man's grace; one man's disobedience, another man's obedience. The first we have by birth, the second by our second birth because of grace. Amen.