

Romans: The Good News of God

The Work of Christ

Romans 5:15-21

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The Work of Christ

Scripture

In Romans 5:12-21 the apostle Paul presents Adam and Christ as two “representative figures” whose acts determine the destiny of all who belong to them. Last week we examined “The Work of Adam” in Romans 5:12-14. And today, we shall explore “The Work of Christ” in Romans 5:15-21.

Let’s read Romans 5:12-21, so that we can see Paul’s entire argument in context:

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— ¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 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.

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. 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.**

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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. ²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus

Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:12-21)

Introduction

In his booklet titled, “What Is Justification by Faith Alone?” J. V. Fesko says that all people must at some point stand in the presence of God and be judged. When that happens, there is only one of two possible outcomes. The person will be declared to be either “Guilty” or “Not Guilty.” Or, in biblical terms, God will either *condemn* or *justify* the person who stands before him.

Because Adam’s sin has been passed on to all his posterity, all people stand under the condemnation of God. Since God requires perfect obedience to his law, every person will be declared “Guilty” by God and condemned as a law-breaker.

So then, how can a sinful person be declared “Not Guilty” rather than “Guilty” by God on the Day of Judgment?

The answer is found in the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* defines “justification” as follows: “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”¹

So, how can a sinner be declared “Not Guilty”? Which is to ask, how can a sinner be *justified* in the sight of God?

All people are sinners. All people have broken God’s law. There is no-one righteous. But, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to obey the law on behalf of sinners. Jesus lived his entire life in perfect obedience to God’s law. He never, ever broke the law of God. He then offered to pay the penalty for sin, and also to credit sinners with his perfect obedience—the obedience which God requires. The sinner is then able to be justified by God—that is, to be declared “Not Guilty” by God—when he stops trying to present his

¹ *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs*, 3rd edition (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), Question 33.

own imperfect, inadequate obedience to God and believes that Jesus' perfect obedience has been credited to him.

The sinner does nothing in order to receive a verdict of "Not Guilty." He simply believes that God will accept him as righteous in his sight only because of the perfect obedience of Jesus that has been credited to his account.

It is because of this that the Scottish pastor, Horatius Bonar, wrote, "Thy works, not mine, O Christ, speak gladness to this heart; they tell me all is done; they bid my fear depart."²

Today, I want to examine further how Jesus is the representative head of all who are justified by faith alone.

Lesson

In Romans 5:12-21 the apostle Paul contrasts the work of Adam (the sinful, representative head of all humanity) with the work of Christ (the sinless, representative head of all redeemed humanity). This is summarized in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, where he says, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Last week, we examined the work of Adam. And today, we shall examine the work of Christ. We shall see the effectiveness (5:15), extent (5:16), efficacy (5:17), essence (5:18-19), and energy (5:20-21) of Christ's work.³

I. The Effectiveness of Christ's Work (5:15)

First, let us examine the effectiveness of Christ's work.

Paul says in verse 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."**

² J. V. Fesko, *What Is Justification by Faith Alone?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 5-6.

³ John MacArthur provides a helpful outline and material in his commentary, *Romans* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996, c1991, c 1994), 301-309.

Christ's work is seen in contrast to Adam's work in these verses. The apostle Paul is contrasting **the free gift** of Christ with **the trespass** of Adam.

The free gift refers to something that "has been given as the result of a gracious act of God."⁴ In context, Paul is referring to Jesus' atoning sacrifice, which is credited to those whom God justifies (that is, declares "Not Guilty").

The trespass has the basic idea of "a deviation from living according to what has been revealed as the right way to live."⁵ Adam's **trespass**, his disobedience to the one, single, simple command of God not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17) resulted in sin and death.

The word "**many**" is used in two different ways in this passage for the purpose of parallelism. With respect to **one man's trespass** the word "**many**" refers to all people without exception. On the other hand, with respect to **the free gift** the word "**many**" refers to all those who are recipients of **the free gift**.

The heart of Paul's comparison is that Adam's **trespass** is immeasurably superseded by Christ's **free gift**. And so, Paul says that **if many died**, that is, if all people 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**.

The sin of Adam brought death into this world to all people.

But God's grace is so great that it is able to overcome the devastating and degrading effects of sin.

John MacArthur says that

the practical truth of Romans 5:15 is that the power of sin, which is death, can be broken, but the power of Christ, which salvation, cannot be broken. . . . Jesus Christ broke the power of sin and death, but the converse is not true. Sin and death cannot break the power of Jesus Christ. The condemnation of Adam's sin is re-

⁴ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 407.

⁵ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 298.

versible; the redemption of Jesus Christ is not. The effect of Adam's act is permanent only if not nullified by Christ. The effect of Christ's act, however, is permanent for believing individuals and not subject to reversal or nullification. We have the great assurance that once we are in Jesus Christ, we are in him forever.⁶

That is why the apostle Paul said to Timothy that "the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus. . . [has] abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10).

So, if you are a Christian, you can have great assurance. God's declaration of "Not Guilty" can never, ever be reversed! If you have been justified by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone, you can never be condemned again.

II. The Extent of Christ's Work (5:16)

Second, notice the extent of Christ's work.

Paul says in verse 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.**"

Paul continues to show the contrast between Adam's work and Christ's work.

From Adam there was **one trespass** that resulted in **judgment** and **brought condemnation** to all people. So, *one sin* by *one man* at *one time* brought God's **judgment** and **condemnation**.

However, from Christ there were **many trespasses** that resulted in **the free gift** that brought **justification**. Now, of course Christ himself did not have **many trespasses**, for in fact he was sinless. However, he vicariously bore the **many trespasses** of all those who would be justified. So, *many sins* borne by *one man* at *one time* brought **the free gift** and **justification**.

Now, notice that God hates sin so much that it took only one

⁶ John MacArthur, *Romans* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996, c1991, c 1994), 304.

sin to condemn Adam and all people in him. God had given Adam only one, single, simple command to obey: “Don’t eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” But Adam disobeyed. And because God hates sin so much, it took only one act of disobedience by Adam for God to condemn him and all men in him.

In the movie *Ben-Hur* Judah Ben-Hur is a rich merchant of noble blood in Jerusalem. Preceding the arrival of a new governor, Ben-Hur’s childhood friend Messala arrives as military commanding officer of the Roman garrison. At first Judah and Messala are happy to meet after years apart, but their differing political views separate them. Messala believes in the glory of Rome and worldly imperial power, while Ben-Hur is devoted to God and his Jewish people. Messala asks Ben-Hur to caution his countrymen about protests, uprisings, or criticism of the Roman government. Judah complies, but refuses to disclose the names of the dissidents, and the two part in anger.

Shortly after Messala’s arrival and during the welcoming parade for the new Roman governor, a roofing tile falls down from Ben-Hur’s house and startles the governor’s horse, throwing him off and nearly killing him. Although Messala knows that it was an accident, he condemns Judah to the galleys and throws Judah’s mother and sister into prison in order to intimidate the restive Jewish people by punishing a powerful local family and personal friend.

Messala says to Ben-Hur, “If I make an example of punishing you, a friend and virtually a family member, everyone will know that I am serious about punishing wrongdoing.”

Similarly, God hates sin. And the very first time Adam sinned God showed his displeasure by punishing Adam. That should send a message to all of Adam’s posterity about how seriously God views sin.

But as great as God’s hatred for sin is, his love for the sinner is even greater. Despite that fact that God hates sin so much that only one sin was enough to condemn all people, his loving grace is greater yet in that he provided justification, not only for the one

man for the one sin, but for a multitude of people for all sins.

Julia Johnston was involved in the work of Sunday schools for many years at the First Presbyterian Church of Peoria, Illinois. She wrote approximately 500 hymn texts. But only one has become well-known. It is known as “Marvelous Grace of Our Loving Lord.” Listen to the first stanza and chorus:

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!
Yonder on Calvary’s mount outpoured—
there where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Chorus:
Grace, grace, God’s grace,
grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
grace, grace, God’s grace,
grace that is greater than all our sin!⁷

III. The Efficacy of Christ’s Work (5:17)

Third, observe the efficacy of Christ’s work.

Paul says 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.”**

Adam’s sin brought death. Now, when Adam sinned he did not want to die. He believed Eve, who was herself deceived, that they would become like God. But his sin produced the very opposite result. He did not become like God. In fact, he even found himself cut off from a relationship with God. And, he died—spiritually, at first, and physically, later.

On the other hand, Christ’s work was efficacious. That is, it produced the desired result. Jesus’ intent was that **those who receive the abundance of** that marvelous **grace** of our loving Lord

⁷ Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions*, Including Indexes (Grand rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1990), 172.

and the free gift of righteousness would reign in life through the one man who acted on their behalf, namely, **Jesus Christ**.

Adam's one act brought death, though that was not his intention.

Christ's one act brought life, which was his intention. Those who belong to Christ are now in a right relationship with God. They not only have eternal life, but they also have an abundant life.

Moreover, to **reign in life** through Christ means that Christians now have power over sin. Later in this letter the apostle Paul says, "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:17-18).

Practically, that means that you don't have to react the way you used to react before you became a Christian. You don't have to get angry for the wrong things. You don't have to watch the wrong things. You are able to forgive others and receive forgiveness. You can let go of bitterness, hatred, and jealousy. You can trust others. You can love in ways that you have never done before.

And all of this is because of Christ!

IV. The Essence of Christ's Work (5:18-19)

Fourth, look at the essence of Christ's work.

Paul says in verses 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.**"

These verses simply summarize what Paul has been saying in this section of God's word.

The **one trespass** of the one man, Adam, **led to condemnation for all men**.

Similarly, the **one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men**. Now, of course, Paul does not literally mean

“**all**” in a universal sense. Paul is not a universalist. He does not mean that **all men** universally will be justified. Rather, “**all**” means “all kinds of men,” or perhaps, “all who are justified in Christ.”

I think it is helpful to realize that what is being emphasized is the federal headship of each Adam. We recognize more easily that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to each believer. Thus, it is Christ’s obedience that is the reason for our acceptance with God.

In the same way, it is the sin of Adam that is imputed to every person. It is Adam’s disobedience that is the reason for our rejection by God. We then commit actual sins because we have inherited a sin nature from Adam.

A person who is a Christian is one who has been justified by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone. He had been condemned to die, but because of faith in Christ he is now justified and declared by God to be “Not Guilty.” And so he is declared righteous, or to use Paul’s language, he is **made righteous**.

The Christian, who has been justified by faith alone, rejoices in the truth that Christ has paid the penalty for his sins. And so, he joins with the hymn-writer and says:

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious tho’t!—
My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!⁸

V. The Energy of Christ’s Work (5:20-21)

And finally, notice the energy of Christ’s work.

Paul says in verses 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.**”

⁸ *Logos Hymnal*, 1st edition, (Oak harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995).

Paul is going to say a lot more about **the law** in chapter 7. However, let me simply say at this point that **the law** itself has no power to condemn nor does it have power to save. The purpose of the law is to reveal God's standard of perfection, which no-one, except Jesus Christ, is able to attain.

Conclusion

So, in these verses we see the effectiveness (5:15), extent (5:16), efficacy (5:17), essence (5:18-19), and energy (5:20-21) of Christ's work.

One of my favorite movies is *Chariots of Fire*. It is the story of Eric Liddell, who was born of missionary parents in China. He grew up in Scotland, where he excelled in running.

It was on this day, April 6, 1923, that Eric Liddell spoke publicly for the first time about how God justified him.

He eventually won a gold medal at the 1924 Paris Olympics in a race for which he had not trained, because he refused to run on the Sabbath.

After the Olympics he went to China. However, when the Japanese invaded China in 1937, he remained. And in 1943 he found himself interned in a camp outside Peking. He eventually died at the age of 43 as the result of a massive brain tumor.⁹

I know a lady who was interned in that same camp as a young elementary schoolgirl. "Uncle Eric," as all the children called him, was a man transformed by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. When he died they were all heartbroken, but they knew that "Uncle Eric" was the recipient of eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ. He was standing before God, and God was able to declare him "Not Guilty" because he was justified by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone. The work of Adam had been immeasurably superseded by the work of Christ in his life. May that be true of you and me too. Amen.

⁹ Robert J. Morgan, *On This Day: 365 Amazing and Inspiring Stories About Saints, Martyrs & Heroes*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000, c 1997) April 6.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAAYER:

O God, human theories as to what is wrong with the world and how to fix it are both unnecessarily complex and, at the same time, thin and trite.

But your explanation is simple, clear, and true.

There is Adam, and there is Christ.

In Adam, we have a problem—sin and death.

In Christ, we have a solution—justification and life.

And his gracious solution far outweighs our sinful problem.

We will never exhaust the resources of our new Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, with whom we live in deep union forever.

When we repent of the very worst sins we will ever commit, we will not find that we have gone beyond the depth of his mercy

No pit of our sin can ever go deeper than his grace.

O God, we do receive and trust in Jesus Christ now.

We joyfully affirm his headship over us, and his grace cleansing and forgiving us.

Reign in grace, Lord Jesus!

And let our lives be a living demonstration that your grace breaks the degrading power of sin.

And all of this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.