

# Five Contrasts

**Introduction.** In the first four chapters of Romans, the topic of righteousness through faith in Christ and man's individual responsibility for his sin, condemnation and response to Christ has been emphasized in clear, prosaic language.

In Romans 5:12-21, Paul sums up this thesis in a dramatic contrast of Adam (representing sinful mankind) and Christ (representing the gracious response of heaven). In this dramatic presentation, Adam and Christ appear upon the stage of inspiration in five closely related sequences, each showing the overwhelming superiority of God's grace to sin and its consequence. We have gained in Christ far more than we lost in Adam, so much so that we "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2).

## I. *The Death Of Many/The Life Of Many (Romans 5:12-15)*

- A. Vs. 12 forms the key to all that follows. "Wherefore" shows the relation to earlier verses, while the "as" anticipates a counterpart or contrast. Through Adam sin entered, or was introduced into the world.
  1. Compare 2 John 7 where the Gnostic deceivers "entered the world." Adam's sin no more made the people of the world sinners, than the Gnostics made early Christians to apostatize.
  2. Nor is the (spiritual) death of this verse the immediate consequence of Adam's sin. Adam introduced sin into the world, but Adam did not directly produce universal condemnation. Each one's sin is the causative ground for his own spiritual death (Romans 3:23; Ephesians 2:1-3).
- B. Paul's statement that "sin is not imputed when there is no law" is equal to his statement that "where no law is, there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15). Prior to Moses, no general codified law for the identification of sin had been given. Yet, sin-related death reigned (vs. 14).
  1. If this sin was "in Adam" it would have been like his sin -- a violation of positive precept (Genesis 2:16-17). Said another way, his was a deliberate act of disobedience.
  2. But Paul says their sin was unlike that of Adam's. These people had violated the moral law of God before the law of Moses.
  3. This proves that we are not all guilty of Adam's sin. Death reigned over those who were guilty of sin, but were not guilty of a sin like Adam's sin.
- C. Vs. 15 completes the contrast begun in vs. 12. Following Adam's example "the many" died, and brought upon themselves spiritual death. But the antagonistic spirit of the sinner, is countered by the exceedingly abounding grace of God. The grace of God abounded much more than the evil effects of Adam's trespass.

## II. ***The Judgment Of Condemnation/The Gift Of Justification (Romans 5:16)***

- A. In vs. 16, the personal guilt of Adam is emphasized, but the free gift of God was not simply equal in scope with the sin of Adam. Seeing the sin of Adam, God gave a judgment regarding punishment that resulted in condemnation for all who sin.
- B. Justification is a "declaration of righteousness." It is a sentence of acquittal by which God acquits men of their guilt on the conditions of the sacrifice of Christ and the acceptance of Christ by faith.
- C. The condemnation came by one trespass, but the free gift came by many trespasses; that is, Jesus came to save us from our many sins as well as from the evil consequences of Adam's sin. God's grace covers a greater range of evils than the one sin of Adam.

## III. ***The Reign Of Death/The Reign Of Life (Romans 5:17)***

- A. The act of one brought death into the world. Through Adam, spiritual death began to reign.
  - 1. It is a fact that spiritual death, as well as physical death, entered the world through the sin of Adam; and it is a fact that spiritual life entered the world through Jesus Christ.
  - 2. But are we dead spiritually because Adam brought spiritual death into the world? No more than we are alive spiritually because Christ brought spiritual life into the world!
- B. We do not partake of spiritual death unconditionally. To say that people are born subject to sin is far from saying that they are born sinners. Adam was created subject to sin, and he sinned; but that does not prove that he was created a sinner, or with a depraved nature (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Adam had freewill and could choose to sin.
- C. Although death may seem the victor, saints in Christ will reign as conquerors in Christ (Romans 8:37). Notice that Paul speaks of the "gift" of righteousness; but if a person is not free to accept or reject a thing, it cannot be properly called a gift. Therefore, the righteousness of Christ cannot be "imputed" to us!
  - 1. We are made righteous by the cleansing power of the gospel of Christ, but we must submit to that plan of righteousness. We attain to righteousness through the forgiveness of our sins.
  - 2. Spiritual life and spiritual death are both the results of our own choices. This destroys the concept of the personal imputation of Christ's righteousness.

## IV. ***The One Act Of Transgression/The One Act Of Righteousness (Romans 5:18)***

- A. This verse is a recapitulation of and connects back with vs. 12. Vss.

13-17 are a parenthetical statement.

- B. From the condemnation that came upon all men through one trespass we are released by the justification of life through the one act of righteousness of Jesus Christ.
  - 1. By His death, Christ more than counteracted the effect of Adam's sin.
  - 2. He both delivered us from fear of death (Hebrews 2:15) and looses us from our sins (Revelation 1:10).
- C. Here Paul stresses the universality of the results. The decree of punishment is passed on all and Christ's righteousness was for all. In each case, all people are accountable for their own sins, and are equally invited to come to Christ for mercy (John 3:16; Mark 16:15-16).

V. ***One Man's Disobedience/One Man's Obedience (Romans 5:19)***

- A. The final contrast concerns the subjective and practical results of the two categories. Adam's way was one of disobedience, while Christ's way was one of obedience.
- B. The "many" who follow the way of Adam are "made (constituted) sinners," and the "many" who submit to Christ shall, through Him, be "made righteous." The "many" would be speaking of those who have arrived at the age of accountability.
  - 1. Paul does not say how these were made sinners by the disobedience of Adam, nor how they are made righteous by the obedience of Christ.
  - 2. It is pure assumption to argue that the disobedience of Adam is imputed to his offspring, or that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to anybody.
    - a) It was not Christ's sinless life by which He delivered and redeemed us. It was His obedience in death (Hebrews 5:8-9).
    - b) Men greatly err when they speak of Christ's righteousness being imputed to us as if we are made sinless by the sinlessness of Christ.
    - c) It was one act of obedience, not a life of obedience, which made it possible for us to be raised from the dead and be raised to walk in newness of life.
- C. Neither guilt or personal righteousness can be transferred from one to another, but the consequences of either may, to some extent, fall upon others.
  - 1. By his sin Adam brought about conditions that make every person subject to temptation. In this way he made sinners.
    - a) For example, Madelyn Murray 'O Hare probably influenced many people to be atheists.

- b) But Madelyn Murray 'O Hare did not "impute" her atheism to anyone else!
2. Christ became "obedient unto death" (Philippians 2:8), and that act of obedience makes many people righteous.
  3. As Adam's disobedience did not make "many" sinners without their choice, so neither does the obedience of Christ make "many" righteous without their choice.

**Conclusion.** These colorful contrasts were dramatic illustrations in the midst of Paul's arguments on law versus grace. He now returns to that theme in vss. 20-21. "The law entered" (vs. 20) or came between the promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) and its fulfillment in Christ (Galatians 3:16-29). Why? "That the offence might abound," i.e., be more apparent (Romans 3:19-20; 7:13).

Man sinned in the absence of a codified law; but specific, positive precepts clearly identified man's transgressions and emphasized the futility of seeking justification via law. Paul said that the Law served "to bring us unto Christ" (Galatians 3:24); and law has not lost that function today. So Paul closes this section of his letter with a grand summation in Romans 5:21. It is God's grace that produced this plan of righteousness; it is the power that banishes sin from the heart and leads a man in devoted service to God.