

A photograph of several vibrant red hibiscus flowers in full bloom, set against a bright, hazy background with a prominent sun flare in the upper right corner. The flowers are the central focus, with their petals showing some white variegation. The overall mood is warm and serene.

Adam and Christ:

Romans 5

A
Ruín and Redemption.com
Teaching Series

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A Study of Romans 5:12-21

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A Study of Romans 5:12-21

The Glory of Imputed Righteousness

I. An Introduction to Romans 5:12-21

We've been studying Genesis 3 in a lot of detail, and now we're going to switch gears a little bit. In this lesson we're going to continue to study the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, but we're going to look at these two covenants from a different passage of Scripture: Romans 5:12-21. We're going to do this because this passage in Romans 5 helps to clarify some questions that Genesis left unanswered. As one theologian put it: "Moses tells us *the history* of Adam's fall, and Paul explains the *mystery* and the *consequences* thereof."¹ It's almost as if God gave us Romans 5 as a commentary on Genesis 3.²

At the heart of the Scriptures are two different men acting as representatives of two different covenants. Scripture speaks of two Adams—the first Adam (Adam) and the second (or last) Adam (Christ).³

The first Adam acted as a covenant head and representative for the entire human race in the *Covenant of Works*.⁴ The fate of all humanity hinged on whether Adam obeyed or disobeyed God's command. And so, as we saw earlier, when Adam sinned, he plunged not only himself, but the whole world along with him into condemnation and death. You see, "the truth is that," because of Adam, "every member of our race enters this world a guilty sinner before he ever commits a single transgression."⁵

This is the first thing that Paul is going to prove in Romans 5:12-21. But he's also going to prove something else: Paul is going to show us that Christ—the *second* Adam—is *also* a covenant head and representative. Just as Adam was the covenant head representing all humankind in the Covenant of Works, so too *Christ* is the covenant head representing all His people in the *Covenant of Grace*.

Now, the main thing Paul wants to show us here in this passage is that we are justified in Christ under the Covenant of Grace *in exactly the same way* that we were condemned in Adam under the Covenant of Works. Paul wants to show us that just as our *condemnation in Adam* was actually not based on us or what we did or didn't do at all—but solely upon what Adam did—so too, our *justification in Christ* is actually not based on us at all and what we do or don't do—but solely upon what Christ has done.⁶

¹ Thomas Goodwin, in referring to Romans 5:12-21.

² *One helpful illustration here:* Many of us have been on airplanes, but very few of us know how it is that they actually work. We know enough to believe that the plane is able to safely carry us from one place to another, but we know very little about how it is that it actually does so! The same is true of our salvation. When we're saved, we understand enough to know that we're sinners who need Jesus to save us; we come to know that we're condemned sinners before a holy God, but that in and through Christ we might be justified in His sight. But even as Christians, many of us are still a bit fuzzy on how it all actually works. Well, in our airplane analogy, Romans 5 is like taking a tour of the Boeing factory where the planes are put together. This chapter teaches us the "nitty-gritties" about both how we were condemned in Adam, and how it is we're justified in Christ.

³ 1 Corinthians 15:45.

⁴ I noted in Lesson 2 that when I use this language I'm including everyone except Christ. Technically, it's more proper to say that Adam was the covenant representative and head for *all his posterity*—which was the entire human race—except One.

⁵ A.W. Pink, *Divine Covenants*. We might here remember our biblical illustrations from Lesson 2: We see the principle of imputed sin all throughout the Scriptures in stories such as *the cursing of Canaan* (Genesis 9), *the story of Achan* (Joshua 7), and *the fate of Haman's sons* (Esther 9:13-14) and *Daniel's accusers* (Daniel 6:24). *To freshen our memory:* what we saw was that the families of those who sinned were punished—not for their own sin—but for the sin of the one representing them. To take the example of *Achan*: his entire family suffered punishment along with him—not because of their own sins—but because of the sin of their covenant head (Achan). Achan alone sinned—but his entire posterity was punished along with him. *They* were put to death—not for their own sins—but for *his* sin. He alone sinned—but they were counted guilty with him. He alone transgressed, but they were punished with him. Achan's posterity was punished for a sin that they did not personally commit. So it was with Adam, the appointed covenant head for all humanity: *we* were punished with him for a sin *he* alone committed.

⁶ This same truth is echoed over and over in the writings of Reformed theologians: *Vos*: "representation in Adam. . . runs

The biggest debate among interpreters has to do with the last clause in verse 12. The following are the possible interpretations of the meaning of this last clause of Romans 5:12, “because all sinned”:

MEANING OF THE LAST PHRASE OF ROMANS 5:12: “BECAUSE ALL SINNED”

NAME OF VIEW	TRANSLATION OF PHRASE	MEANING OF PHRASE	WHY ALL MEN DIE
The PELAGIAN View	“for all <i>have personally</i> sinned”	All die because all are guilty of committing actual sins (like Adam)	Actual Transgressions
The CORRUPTION View	“for all <i>have become corrupt</i> ”	All die because all have been infected with Adam's corrupt nature	Imparted Corruption
The CLASSICAL View	“for all sinned <i>in Adam</i> ”	All die because the guilt of Adam's first sin has been imputed to all	Imputed Guilt

Let's spend some time looking at these different views one by one.²⁹

1. The PELAGIAN View: There was a heretic named Pelagius who invented a new theory about the nature of man in relation to Adam's fall in the 4th century A.D. His theory was universally rejected and condemned by the Church as soon as it was fully understood.³⁰ Pelagius taught that Adam in no way represented humanity as their covenant head, and so humanity in no way fell when he fell. Accordingly, Pelagius taught that there is no such thing as inherent corruption (original sin). He taught that men are born into the world in the same state in which Adam was created, with pure souls, untainted in any way with sin. Consequently, Adam's sin didn't effect anyone but himself. According to Pelagius, the only way that Adam's sin effected the rest of humanity in any way was that it left us with a bad example to follow.³¹

So, Pelagius and many who have followed in his footsteps, have taken the last clause of Romans 5:12 as referring to the *actual* sins of all men. They understand Paul to be saying in verse 12: “just as sin entered into the world, and death through sin, *so too death spreads to all men, because all sin.*” They interpret Paul as saying, “As Adam sinned, and therefore died, so also all die, because all sin.”³² This interpretation has been almost unanimously rejected and dismissed by the Church for these reasons:

A) It's not true GRAMMATICALLY: The tense Paul uses here in verse 12 for both “spread” and “sinned,” is the simple past, or simple historical (aorist) tense.³³ Again, Paul does *not* say here: “so too death *spreads/has spread* to all men, because all *sin/have sinned.*” He says, “and so death *spread* to all men, because all *sinned.*” Namely, death spread to all because all sinned in and with Adam in his sin.

B) It's not true CONTEXTUALLY: Verse 12 is inseparably bound together to verses 13-14 (not just because verses 13-14 directly follow verse 12, but because of the “for” connecting them). But verses 13-14 in no way prove the Pelagian view, that all men die because they all sin just as Adam did. Actually, these verses prove the exact opposite (as we'll see), that some die even though they don't sin as Adam did.

C) It's not true STRUCTURALLY: Romans 5:12-21 (especially verses 12-19) is one coherent passage. And over the course of this same passage, Paul clearly tells us no less than *five times* that condemnation and death have come upon the human race *because of the one sin of the one man Adam*: “by the transgression of the one the many died” (v15); “the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation” (v16); “by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one” (v17); “through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men” (v18); “through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners” (v19). It's undeniable. So, to say that verse 12 teaches that condemnation and death have actually come upon the human race *because of our personal sins*—is to *totally contradict* everything Paul is *clearly* saying in this passage. One of the basic rules of Scriptural interpretation is to let the clearer Scriptures interpret those that are less clear. And what *is clear* about the passage is that death and condemnation came upon *the entire human race* because of *Adam's* sin. So the ambiguity of verse

²⁹ NOTE: If time is an issue, feel free to skip over the objections against the *Pelagian* and *Corruption* Views, as those objections will come up again in briefer form in the discussion of the *Classical* View.

³⁰ Hodge, *Systematics*, V2. Much of this paragraph gleaned from Hodge.

³¹ We could note here that Islam's view of sin is essentially the Pelagian View.

³² Hodge from his commentary on *Romans*.

³³ Actually, *all three verbs* in the verse are in the aorist tense: “spread” and “sinned” are in the same tense as “entered into.”

12 must be interpreted in light of the clarity of the rest of the passage. We simply can't get around it: "the Scriptures assert that the sentence of condemnation has passed upon *all men* for the sin of *one man*."³⁴

D) It's not true EXPERIENTIALLY: If men only die as a result of actual sins that they have committed, then infants who die in the womb or in infancy are a massive problem for Pelagians. Again, death is the judicial penalty for sin. And according to Pelagius, the only sins that men are guilty of are actual, personal sins. But what infant who dies in infancy can be charged with knowingly sinning against God?

Further, if it's true that everyone is born in the same state as Adam before the fall, totally untainted by inherent corruption (original sin), then how in the world can it be that there hasn't been a single individual in the history of mankind—excepting One, our Lord Jesus Christ—who has even come close to living a sinless life? If the Pelagian doctrine was right, we would expect at least something like a 50-50 ratio between sinners and the sinless. But we can't even find a single person. You see, the truth is, original sin—inherent corruption—is very much like the law of gravity: you don't need a science book to prove it's true; you simply know it's true from experience. According to the Pelagian view, we sin simply because we have bad examples. But this simply doesn't do justice to what we know about the world.³⁵

E) It's not true THEOLOGICALLY: We mentioned earlier that Paul's main aim in this passage is to teach us that we are *justified* in Christ under the Covenant of Grace in precisely the same way that we were *condemned* in Adam under the Covenant of Works. This is most clear in verse 18: "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men." Paul's saying: Just as it was with your *condemnation* in Adam, so it is with your *justification* in Christ. There is a very real parallel. And we would all agree that no man was ever justified by his own good works or his own righteousness. But if we take seriously Paul's parallel comparing justification in Christ with condemnation in Adam, that's exactly the implication we have to draw with the Pelagian view. How so? Because if we are *condemned*—not on account of Adam's imputed sin—but rather on account of our own personal sin, then the corollary truth is that we are *justified*—not on account of Christ's imputed righteousness—but rather on account of our own personal righteousness. So, the Pelagian view necessarily results in a doctrine of justification by works.³⁶

2. The CORRUPTION View: In the mid-1600's, three professors³⁷ at a theological school in Saumur, France, introduced a significant modification to John Calvin's view of imputation. According to Calvin, men were condemned *both* because Adam's corruption was imparted to us *and* because Adam's sin was imputed to us. Though Calvin held that we are guilty on *both* counts, he interpreted the last phrase in Romans 5:12, "for all sinned," to mean that, "all *became corrupt/sinful*."³⁸ Well, these professors took

³⁴ Hodge, Systematics, V2.

³⁵ Vos puts it: "The Pelagian theory leaves the universality of sin entirely unexplained. . . The possibility that all [can sin], as an abstract possibility, does not explain why they all have actually sinned." (V2, p29. Note: quote edited for greater clarity). Another says: "Original sin explains everything and without it one cannot explain anything" (de Maistre in Bavinck, V3, p101).

³⁶ As John Murray notes in his commentary on Romans: "How contradictory would be the appeal to the parallel obtaining on the side of condemnation and death if Paul finds the basis of the condemnation and death of all in the actual transgression of each individual. If this latter were Paul's teaching here the parallel that would be necessary on the other side would be justification by works, that each individual would be justified by his own actions and attain to life on that basis." (p184).

³⁷ Moise Amyraut, Louis Cappel and Josue' La Place (also spelled Placaesus).

³⁸ Calvin was wrong in interpreting this phrase in this way. But a few words can be said in his defense. *First*, again, Calvin did not hold to the view of "Mediate Imputation" that these later French professors concocted. From what we can gather from his writings, he held that we are guilty and thereby condemned and suffer the penalty of death *both* on account of Adam's sin imputed to us *and* on account of Adam's depravity imparted to us. He did not deny that Adam's imputed sin is the ground of our guilt and condemnation, but just that it is the *only* ground of it: "By Adam's sin we are not condemned through imputation *alone*, as though we were punished *only* for the sin of another; but we suffer his punishment, because we ourselves are guilty; for as our nature is vitiated in him, it is regarded by God as having committed sin." (*Romans*, 210). So again, the doctrine of the school of Saumur was not Calvin's doctrine. *Second*, the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin wasn't something that was disputed in his day. Calvin was fighting different battles. He was devoting his attention to refuting the Pelagians (who denied both imputed guilt and imparted corruption) and the Roman Catholics (who significantly heavily emphasized imputed guilt to the near denial of imparted corruption). It was the doctrine of Adam's inherent corruption that was being diminished in Calvin's day, so it shouldn't surprise us that he doesn't devote a ton of attention to it. *Third*, to say that Calvin should have had more definitive views of imputation is anachronistic. Distinctions between Mediate and Immediate imputation didn't exist in his day. We look back at Calvin 500 years later, having reaped the benefits of several generations of theologians following in the steps of the Reformation. Calvin and the Reformers were living in a time where they had to re-discover the basic fundamentals of the gospel; they were doing their best to plant the seeds of the gospel. The

Calvin's interpretation of Romans 5:12, "all *became corrupt/sinful*," and created an entirely new doctrine, that Calvin never believed or taught, which is now called *Mediate Imputation*. According to this view, men are condemned and punished solely on account of the corrupt nature they inherited from Adam. In other words, we're not guilty because Adam's sin was *imputed* to us—only because his corruption was *imparted* to us:³⁹ "Adam having defiled his own nature by sin, that depraved nature was transmitted to all his posterity, and therefore all die because they are thus inherently corrupt."⁴⁰ In short, Adam sinned. As a result of his sin, Adam's nature became corrupt. That corrupt nature is passed down to us. And because we inherit that same corrupt nature, on that basis we stand guilty and condemned before God.⁴¹

Now, it's true that we sin because we're sinners (not *visa versa*). And it's true that because of Adam's sin, every one of us is born with a corrupt nature. But the question is: Is Paul telling us in this passage that our inherent corruption is the *basis of our condemnation*? We would say no for the following reasons:

A) It's not true GRAMMATICALLY: This view is contrary to the simple meaning of the words in Romans 5:12. Just as Paul doesn't say that death spread to all "because all *sin/have sinned*," (the Pelagian view), neither does he say—as he could have—that death spread to all men "because all *became sinful*," which is how it's interpreted under this inherent corruption view. Paul simply says, "because all sinned."

B) It's not true STRUCTURALLY: We saw above that in verses 15-19, Paul tells us again and again that the basis of our condemnation and death is the *one sin* of the *one man*, Adam. We are held guilty and suffer the judicial penalty of death because of *Adam's sin*. But to say we're guilty and suffer death because of Adam's sin is completely different than saying that we're guilty and suffer death because of inherent corruption passed down from Adam. Verses 15-19 tell us that we're guilty and condemned because of the sin Adam committed—not because of the corruption that later resulted from that sin.⁴²

C) It's not true BIBLICALLY: When God told Adam in Genesis 2:17, "for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die", He was letting Adam know that death would be *the penalty* for his sin. And God wasn't just talking about *physical* death—He was talking about *spiritual* death: Adam would die *spiritually*. After all, Adam *didn't* die *physically* the very day that he ate of the fruit—but he did die *spiritually* that day. *So, spiritual death would be the punishment for Adam's sin.* Well, here's what we have to understand: Inherent corruption *IS* spiritual death. The spiritual death that came upon Adam when he fell into sin *was inherent corruption*. And this passage teaches us that the same thing is true for us in Adam: Just as *Adam* was punished with spiritual death as a result of *his* sin—so too, *all human kind* was also punished with spiritual death, as a result of *his* sin. So then: Our inherent corruption is not *the*

time would come for others to come along and prune the trees and hedges. *Finally*, it might help us a bit to remember that Calvin wrote his commentary on *Romans* in 1539, when he was only 30 years old. (Gleaned from: Martyn McGeown, *The Resurrection of a French Heresy: Joshua De La Place's Denial of the Immediate Imputation of Adam's Sin to His Posterity*).

³⁹ It was only after Placeus was confronted with the fact that this view (IE, we are condemned on the basis of our inherent corruption) was actually a denial of the doctrine of Adam's imputed sin, that the doctrine of Mediate Imputation actually came into existence. It seems that it was in order to evade the force of this charge (of the denial of imputed sin) that Placeus proposed the distinction between mediate and immediate imputation. Dabney says, "The distinction seems to have been a ruse designed to shelter himself from censure." (cf. Turretin, Hodge). Thus confronted, Placeus and the others claimed that they actually *did* adhere to a belief in Adam's imputed guilt, only that this imputed guilt was *mediated* through the inherent corruption imparted to us (hence the term *Mediate Imputation*). Functionally, however, this view opposes the historic doctrine of imputed sin. The doctrine of imputed sin (now called Immediate) is that our inherent corruption is not the basis for our condemnation—but to the contrary—*its penal consequent*: spiritual death (inherent corruption) is the penalty "inflicted by the just judgment of God on account of Adam's sin." (Hodge, *Systematic Theology*). In other words, we're condemned, not because of our inherent corruption; rather our inherent corruption is the proof that we've been condemned. Placeus turned this around. Instead of teaching that we are *corrupt* because of *imputed guilt* (the Classical View), he taught that we are *guilty* because of *imparted corruption*. "Instead of teaching that we are corrupt because of imputed guilt. . . Placeus turned this around and said: 'Original sin is imputed to us because we are born corrupt.'" (Bavinck, p359). Placeus thus denied both 1) the imputation of the guilt of Adam's first sin, as well as 2) the fact that inherent corruption is a punishment for his first sin.

⁴⁰ Hodge, *Romans*.

⁴¹ It's important to note (as Hodge does in his *Systematic Theology* that this doctrine was formally condemned by the National Synod of France in 1644-45, by the Swiss churches in the "Formula Consensus," and by the theologians of Holland. Thus, this doctrine of mediate imputation was generally condemned both by the Reformed and Lutheran Churches, though it did find some advocates outside of France and has trickled down in various ways into modern theological thought.

⁴² We could add here: If the imputation of Adam's sin to the human race is what Paul's clearly teaching in vv15-19 (as it is), and what Paul says in v12 is the very foundation for the conclusion he draws in vv15-19 (as it is), then to say that Paul's speaking about a completely different truth in v12 than he is in vv15-19 is to undercut the whole meaning of the passage.

reason we're punished (like Adam)—rather—inherent corruption is *the proof* that we've been punished (with Adam). When Adam was punished with spiritual death, we were punished with him—with spiritual death. In other words, Adam's corruption is imparted to us *because* Adam's guilt was imputed to us.

D) It's not true THEOLOGICALLY: We saw above that Paul's main aim in this passage is to teach us that we're justified in Christ under the Covenant of Grace in exactly the same way that we were condemned in Adam under the Covenant of Works. And we saw that if we take this comparison seriously, and if the Pelagian view teaches that it's our personal sins that *condemn* us, then the necessary corollary implication is that it's our own deeds of righteousness that *justify* us. Well, we've got the same problem here with the Corruption view. Because if Paul is indeed showing us that we're justified in Christ in the same way we were condemned in Adam, and if it's true (as the Corruption view teaches) that we're condemned in Adam *because we become inherently corrupt*—then the corollary truth is that we are justified in Christ *because we become inherently holy*. But this is to deny the gospel. The doctrine of justification (as set forth in this passage) is grounded on the truth that it is solely the righteousness of Christ imputed to us—totally apart from any inherent goodness in us—that makes us right with God.⁴³ So, “Although. . . it is true that our nature was corrupted in Adam, and has been transmitted to us in a depraved state, yet that hereditary corruption is not here represented as the ground of our condemnation, any more than the holiness which believers derive from Christ is the ground of their justification.”⁴⁴

3. The CLASSICAL View: We call this view the Classical View⁴⁵ because it is an interpretation of Romans 5:12 that is *first*, rooted in the Old Testament,⁴⁶ *secondly*, has been the primary doctrine of the Church in ages past,⁴⁷ and *thirdly*, continues to be the view of a great majority of scholars and theologians.⁴⁸ In short, the Classical View understands Romans 5:12 as speaking about *imputed sin*.

⁴³ As Hodge says: “It is a still more serious objection that this doctrine [IE, mediate imputation] destroys the parallel between Adam and Christ on which the Apostle lays so much stress in his Epistle to the Romans. The great point which he there labors to teach and to illustrate, and which he represents as a cardinal element of the method of salvation, is that men are justified for a righteousness which is not personally their own. To illustrate and confirm this great fundamental doctrine, he refers to the fact that men have been condemned for a sin which is not personally their own. He over and over insists that it was for the sin of Adam, and not for our own sin or sinfulness, that the sentence of death (the forfeiture of the divine favor) passed upon all. It is on this ground he urges men the more confidently to rely upon the promise of justification on the ground [of] a righteousness which is not inherently ours. This parallel destroyed, the doctrine and argument of the Apostle are overturned, if it be denied that the sin of Adam, as antecedent to any sin or sinfulness of our own is the ground of our condemnation. If we are partakers of the penal consequences of Adam's sin only because of the corrupt nature derived by a law of nature from him, then we are justified only on the ground of our own inherent holiness derived by a law of grace from Christ. We have thus the doctrine of subjective justification, which overthrows the great doctrine of the Reformation, and the great ground of the peace and confidence of the people of God, namely, that a righteousness not within us but wrought out for us—the righteousness of another, even the eternal Son of God, and therefore an infinitely meritorious righteousness—is the ground of our justification before God. Any doctrine which tends to invalidate or to weaken the Scriptural evidence of this fundamental article of our faith is fraught with evil greater than belongs to it in itself considered. This is the reason why the Reformed theologians so strenuously opposed the doctrine of La Place. They saw and said that on his principles the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness antecedent to our sanctification could not be defended.” (Hodge, *Systematics*, V2).

⁴⁴ Hodge, *Romans*. Another objection to the Corruption View is that it can't explain why we inherit Adam's corrupt nature. It can explain *how it is* (by natural generation; IE, WLC #26) that Adam's sin is conveyed to his posterity, but they can't explain *why*. As Vos says: “It [mediate imputation] leaves the transmission to us of Adam's corruption as an unexplained and inexplicable fact, since it does not want to view this corruption as punishment.” (V2, p37; cf. also Bavinck, V3, p109).

⁴⁵ The Classical View is also called Immediate Imputation.

⁴⁶ For examples of imputed sin in the Old Testament, see Lesson 2, Section V, Number 2, sub-section B.

⁴⁷ Imputed guilt from Adam is a teaching that began to appear, it seems, with Ambrosiaster and Augustine in the 4th century A.D. (Moo, p326). Augustine held that “Such was the union between Adam and his descendants, that the same consequences of his transgression came on them that fell upon him. . . involving both guilt and corruption. . . [and] that the loss of original righteousness and the corruption of nature consequent on the fall of Adam are penal inflictions, being the punishment of his first sin.” (Hodge, *Systematics*, p136). Thus, “from the beginning, the universal Church has agreed in holding that the guilt of Adam's first sin was directly charged to the account of the human race in mass, just as it was charged to himself. Likewise, Adam's first sin was punished in the race by desertion and consequent depravity, just as it was punished in him.” (Hodge, *The Imputation of Adam's First Sin To His Posterity*, #13). Again, in his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge writes: “The imputation of Adam's sin has been the doctrine of the Church universal in all ages. It was the doctrine of the Jews, derived from the plain teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures. It was and is the doctrine of the Greek, Latin, Lutheran, and Reformed churches. Its denial is a novelty. . . The points of diversity in reference to this subject do not relate to the fact that Adam's sin is imputed to his posterity, but either to the grounds of that imputation or to its consequences. . . The Lutherans and Reformed held the same doctrine with more consistency and earnestness. But in all this diversity it was universally admitted, first, that certain evils are inflicted upon all mankind on account of Adam's sin; and, secondly, that those evils are penal.” (p160).

⁴⁸ See the last quote in the previous footnote (Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, p160).

According to the Classical View, what Paul means by “all sinned,” is that “all sinned in Adam as their head and representative.”⁴⁹ As the covenant head of the human race, Adam represented all men in such a way, that because of *his* sin, all humanity has been plunged along with him into guilt and condemnation. Adam's sin was judicially reckoned to all men. So, when he fell, we fell with him; when he was condemned, we were condemned with him. *His* sin is reckoned to *us*; *his* transgression is legally charged to *our* account. *He* sinned, but *we* are guilty with him; *he* transgressed, but *we* are condemned with him.

We have a striking example of this in the passages of Scripture that deal with Achan's sin. We've referred back to them before, but there's one detail in particular that we haven't pointed out yet that can really help us understand how it is that “all sinned” (in verse 12) can mean that Adam's sin was imputed to all. Joshua 7:14-21 makes it clear beyond any doubt that it was *Achan alone* who sinned, for one man only was taken by lot, and when Achan confesses his sin he speaks in the first personal singular. And yet, if we turn to Joshua 22:20, we find that, as a result of Achan's sin, wrath fell on “*all* the congregation of Israel”. Why? If Achan alone sinned, then why did wrath fall on *all* Israel? We find our answer if we turn back again to Joshua 7:11-12, where we read: “*Israel* has sinned, and *they* have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And *they* have even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived. Moreover, *they* have also put them among their own things. Therefore *the sons of Israel*. . . have become accursed.” Was it not Achan alone who sinned? Why then does God say that all Israel had sinned? Because Achan's sin was being reckoned as belonging to all Israel. His sin, though not actually belonging to all—was *imputed* to all; and it was for this reason that wrath fell upon all of them. It is precisely this way that we understand what Paul is saying in Romans 5:12. *Adam alone* sinned—and yet wrath fell upon *all humanity*. Why? Because the guilt of his sin is imputed to us—reckoned as ours.

Now, according to this view, Adam's sin is both imputed *and* imparted. *One truth*: the guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to us. *Another truth*: the corruption of his nature is imparted to us. But in the Classical View, these two truths fit together in the exact opposite way that Placaeus had put them in the Corruption View (above). The Classical View reasons this way: 1) God had told Adam that his disobedience would result in death; 2) This was true not just for Adam, but for all those he represented; 3) And this death included spiritual death, which is exactly what inherent corruption is. For Adam, inherent corruption—spiritual death—came upon him *as a judicial penalty* for his sin, along with physical death. And it's exactly the same for all those he represented (all of us): just like Adam, so too, *we* are inflicted with spiritual death as the penalty for Adam's sin, because he represented us. Just as Adam died spiritually as a judicial consequence for his sin—so did all those he represented (all of us). In a word, our inherent corruption isn't the *basis* of our condemnation—it's the *proof*. Whereas Placaeus taught that we're *guilty* because of *imparted corruption*, the Classical View teaches us that we're actually *corrupt* because of *imputed guilt*.

The following charts summarize the differences between the Classical View and the Corruption View:

HOW IS IT THAT ADAM'S SIN IS IMPUTED TO HIS POSTERITY? (DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY)

	A SUMMARY OF THE TWO VIEWS	TAKES ROMANS 5:12,15-19 TO MEAN
MEDIATE IMPUTATION (Corruption View)	The inherent corruption that has been imparted to us in Adam is the judicial <i>grounds/basis</i> of our condemnation: In other words, <i>we are guilty because of Adam's imparted corruption</i>	Adam's trespass resulted in the corruption of human nature, which corruption is the judicial basis of the condemnation and death of all: <i>We die because of Adam's imparted corruption</i>
IMMEDIATE IMPUTATION (Classical View)	The inherent corruption that has been imparted to us in Adam is the penal <i>result/consequence</i> of our condemnation: In other words, <i>we are actually corrupt because of Adam's imputed guilt</i>	Adam's trespass resulted in the guilt of both Adam and the entire human race, which guilt is the judicial basis of the condemnation and death of all: <i>We die because of Adam's imputed guilt</i>

MEDIATE	Adam sinned → Adam's nature corrupted → we inherit this corrupt nature → we are thus punished
IMMEDIATE	Adam sinned → Adam's sin reckoned to us → we are punished with Adam → we are thus corrupted

Now, something we should note here is that there are actually *two distinct lines of thinking* regarding the *basis* of Adam's imputed sin. Both lines of thinking agree that we are all guilty because Adam's sin was

⁴⁹ Hodge, *Romans*.

imputed to us, but they disagree over why it is, exactly, that Adam's sin was imputed. What we've been describing is called the *FEDERALIST (or representative) view*: namely, the reason Adam's sin was imputed to us was that Adam was our covenant representative. When Paul says that we die because “we sinned” in Adam (5:12), he's not saying that we actually, physically, literally, sinned in the garden in and with Adam. No, he's saying that we are treated as sinners, we are regarded and reckoned as having sinned in and with Adam when he sinned, because he was our covenant representative. But there's another group of theologians who subscribe to what is called the *REALIST view*: they also affirm that Adam's sin is imputed to us, but according to them, the reason why Adam's sin is imputed is that we actually, literally, physically sinned in and with Adam. According to them, we're guilty of Adam's sin—not because he was acting on our behalf as our covenant head—but because we actually sinned in and with Adam in the strict and proper sense of the term. So, according to the realist view, “[Adam's] sin is ours not because it is imputed to us; but it is imputed to us, because it is truly and properly our own.”⁵⁰

WHY IS IT THAT ADAM'S SIN IS IMPUTED TO HIS POSTERITY? (THE BASIS OF IMPUTED SIN)

	A SUMMARY OF THE TWO VIEWS	EXAMPLES FROM SCRIPTURE
REALISM	Adam's sin was imputed to all men because we were really there sinning with him when he sinned	Levi paid tithes in that he was “present” in Abraham's loins when he tithed (Heb.7:9-10)
FEDERALISM	Adam's sin was imputed to all men because when Adam sinned he acted for all those he represented	Canaan's curse (Gen.9); Achan's sin (Josh.7); Haman's sons (Esth.9); Daniel's accusers (Dan.6)

So, which view is the right one? We believe that when Paul says, “all sinned in Adam” he's telling us that Adam was acting as our covenant representative in such a way that when he sinned, his act was reckoned as ours. Paul's NOT saying that all men actually sinned in Adam's sin in such a way that his act was literally and physically our act. That's impossible; we didn't even exist at that point.⁵¹ Further, Paul goes on to make it crystal clear, that it was on account of “the transgression of *the one*” that the many died (vv15); it was through “the transgression of *the one*” that death reigned over all (v17).⁵² It wasn't the transgression of *the many*, or the transgression of *all*, sinning in Adam, that brought condemnation upon the human race: It was the transgression of the *one man*, Adam.⁵³ Adam's sin isn't imputed to us because it's truly and properly ours; rather, his sin is ours because it's federally and covenantally imputed to us.⁵⁴

What Scripture teaches is that Adam stood as the covenant head of the human race in the same way that Christ stands as the covenant head of his people: “when it is said that the sin of Adam is imputed to his posterity, it is not meant that they committed his sin, or were the agents of his act. . .but simply that in virtue of the union between him and his descendants, his sin is the judicial ground of the condemnation of his race, precisely as the righteousness of Christ is the judicial ground of the justification of his people.”⁵⁵ Adam's sin—though not ours—was imputed to us in *the Covenant of Works*. And in exactly the same way, Christ's righteousness—though not ours—is imputed to us in *the Covenant of Grace*. The first imputation brought death; the second has brought life. Here's the evidence for the Classical View:⁵⁶

A) It fits GRAMMATICALLY: The Classical View best fits the simple meaning of Paul's words in Romans 5:12. Paul doesn't say that death spread to all men because “all *do sin/have sinned*” (IE, the Pelagian View), or because “all *became sinful*” (IE, the Corruption View),⁵⁷ but simply because “all

⁵⁰ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, p175.

⁵¹ Hodge says: “the act of Adam was not the act of all men. . .it is impossible that they acted his act. To say that a man acted thousands of years before his personality began, does not rise even to the dignity of a contradiction; it has no meaning at all.”

⁵² Dr. Lewis Johnson Jr: the condemnation “is traced to the act of one man, not the act of all men.” (Sermon on Romans 5).

⁵³ Haldane says: “The assertion...that Adam's sin is as truly ours as it was his, does not imply that it is his and ours in the same sense. It was his personally; it is ours because we were in him. Adam's sin, then, is as truly ours as it was his sin, though not in the same way.” Hodge: “Adam's sin may be said to be imputed to us because it is ours, inasmuch as it is the sin of the divinely constituted head and representative of our race. But it is not ours in the same sense in which it was his.” (*Systematic*,s p169).

⁵⁴ One final objection against the Realist View: Just as Mediate Imputation cannot explain why it is that Adam's corruption is transmitted to his posterity, so here, the Realist View leaves unexplained why it is that Adam's sin is considered to be our own, but the sins of our other ancestors are not. As Vos again notes: “The theory of the realistic mode of being in Adam leaves entirely unexplained how Adam's sin can be imputed to us and the sins of all our other ancestors cannot.” (See Vos, V2, p39).

⁵⁵ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, p154.

⁵⁶ Much of the following is compiled again from Hodge.

⁵⁷ As Bavinck notes, the Greek verb used in Romans 5:12 for 'sinned', “refers not to a sinful *state* but to an *act*.” (V3, p84).

sinned.” This verb is in the simple historical (aorist) tense, indicating momentary action *at a particular time*. “And when was that? Doubtless at the fall. All men sinned in Adam's sin. All fell in his fall.”⁵⁸

B) It fits CONTEXTUALLY: Verses 13-14 are inseparably bound to the last clause of verse 12, not just because they follow directly after, but because of the connecting “for” at the beginning of verse 13. This “for” tells us that in verses 13-14, Paul is seeking to prove what he just said in verse 12. But verses 13-14 don't prove the Pelagian View (they actually prove the exact opposite!),⁵⁹ nor do they fit the Corruption View very well.⁶⁰ The interpretation of verse 12 that fits the best with verses 13-14 is the Classical View.

C) It fits STRUCTURALLY: The whole passage of Romans 5:12-19 is a single unit. And what's absolutely clear in verses 15-19 is that all men are condemned and suffer death *on account of the one sin of the one man, Adam*. Paul says it clearly no less than *five* times: “by the transgression of the one the many died” (v15); “the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation” (v16); “by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one” (v17); “through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men” (v18); “through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners” (v19). So then, to say that all men are actually condemned and suffer death *on account of their own sins* (the Pelagian View) would totally contradict the rest of the passage. So too, to say that all men are condemned and suffer death *on account of their inherent corruption* (the Corruption View) is something very different than saying that all men are condemned and suffer death *on account of the one sin of Adam*. So, the Classical View of verse 12 is really the only interpretation that fits the rest of the passage.

Further, it's almost universally agreed that verse 12 is the first part of a comparison that is resumed and completed later in verse 18 (“just as. . .even so”). In other words, what Paul begins to say in verse 12, he later comes back to and repeats in verse 18. So, we could say that verse 18 “is Paul's own interpretation of what he meant when he said 'all sinned'” in verse 12.⁶¹ And in verse 18, Paul is clearly speaking about imputed sin in Adam, when he says: “So then *as* through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, *even so* through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.”

D) It fits THEOLOGICALLY: Paul's whole aim in this passage is to demonstrate that we are justified in Christ the exact same way that we were condemned in Adam. This is clear in verse 18. Paul's saying: just as it was with your condemnation, so it is with your justification. There's a very real parallel. Now, if we take this comparison seriously, and if the Pelagian View of verse 12 teaches that we are condemned by our own personal sins (as it does), then the corollary truth is that we are justified by our own personal deeds of righteousness. That's not good; actually it's heresy. And we've got the same problem with the Corruption View, because if we are condemned in Adam because we become inherently corrupt (as this view teaches), then the corollary truth is that we are justified in Christ because we become inherently righteous. That's also a denial of the gospel. The essence of the doctrine of justification is that in Christ, sinners are declared to be right with God totally apart from any *good works* or *inward righteousness* of their own. And Paul's telling us we were condemned the same way we're justified: *through imputation*. It was Adam's imputed sin that condemned us; and it's Christ's imputed righteousness that justifies us.⁶²

⁵⁸ Hodge, *Romans*.

⁵⁹ As John Murray points out: “In verses 13 and 14 Paul says the opposite [of what Pelagians teach about verse 12]. . .If all die because they are guilty of actual transgression [IE, the Pelagian View], then they die because they sin just as Adam did. But [in vv13-14] Paul says the reverse; some died even though they did not sin after the pattern of Adam.” (*Romans*, p183).

⁶⁰ In short, this is because Paul is arguing in verses 13-14 that the fact that all men die testifies to the fact that all men have broken a law, since death is the enforcement of a penalty, and penalties only exist in the context of law. So, all men must have transgressed a law. What Paul then goes on to show in verses 13-14 is that this law that all men have transgressed cannot be the actual, personal sins that men commit, either against the Law of Moses on the one hand, or the law written on their hearts on the other. This latter fact rules out the Pelagian View of verse 12. But the former, that all men must have transgressed a law, seems to also rule out the Corruption View, for being inherently corrupt is not the same as being guilty of breaking a law.

⁶¹ A quote from Hodge, *Romans*. IE: Q) Why doesn't Paul tell us clearly what he means? A) He does, later in verses 18-19.

⁶² As Hodge says: “That doctrine on which the hope of God's people, either implicitly or explicitly, has ever been founded is, that the righteousness of Christ as something out of themselves, something distinguished from any act or subjective state of theirs, is the ground of their justification. They know that there is nothing in them on which they dare for a moment rely, as the reason why God should accept and pardon them. It is therefore the essential part of the analogy between Christ and Adam, the very truth which the apostle designs to set forth, that the sin of Adam, as distinguished from any act of ours, and from inherent corruption as derived from him, is the ground of our condemnation. If this be denied, then the other great truth must be denied, and our own subjective righteousness be made the ground of our justification; which is to subvert the gospel. . .The scope of the passage. . .is to illustrate the doctrine of justification on the ground of the righteousness of Christ,

MAPPING OUT THE THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE THREE MAJOR VIEWS

VIEW	WHY WE'RE CONDEMNED	WHICH MEANS THAT, IN TURN, WE'RE JUSTIFIED
THE PELAGIAN VIEW	Because of our own actual sinful deeds	Because of our own actual deeds of righteousness
THE CORRUPTION VIEW	Because of our inward corruption	Because of our inward righteousness
THE CLASSICAL VIEW	Because of Adam's sin imputed to us	Because of Christ's righteousness imputed to us

CONCLUSION: So, when Paul says in Romans 5:12 that “death spread to all men, because all sinned,” he's *not* saying that all of us suffer death *because of our own personal sins* (the Pelagian View), *nor* is he saying that all of us suffer death *because of our inherent corrupt nature* (the Corruption View). He's saying that all of us suffer the penal consequent of death *because as our covenant representative, we were reckoned guilty and condemned with Adam in and through his sin*: “when he sinned, we sinned; when he fell, we fell; and we die because we have been accounted as having sinned in and with him” in his sin.⁶³

by a reference to the condemnation of men for the sin of Adam. The analogy is destroyed, the very point of the comparison fails, if anything in us be assumed as the ground of the infliction of the penal evils of which the apostle is here speaking.” (*Romans*). And again, in his commentary on Romans: “That we have corrupt natures, and are personally sinners, and therefore liable to other and further inflictions, is indeed true, but nothing to the point. In like manner it is true that we are sanctified by our union with Christ, and thus fitted for heaven; but these ideas are out of place when speaking of justification. It is to illustrate that doctrine, or the idea of imputed righteousness, that this whole passage is devoted; and, therefore, the idea of imputed sin must be contained in the other part of the comparison, unless the whole be a failure.” (Hodge, *Romans*). Consider the following especially in comparing the implications of the Corruption View versus the Classical View: 1a) If inherent corruption IS the basis of our condemnation in Adam, then inherent righteousness is the basis of our justification in Christ. 1b) But, if inherent corruption is NOT the basis of our condemnation in Adam, then inherent righteousness is NOT the basis of our justification in Christ. 2a) If imputed sin IS the basis of our condemnation in Adam, then imputed righteousness is the basis of our justification in Christ. 2b) But, if imputed sin is NOT the basis of our condemnation in Adam, then imputed righteousness is NOT the basis of our justification in Christ. 3a) But if inherent corruption IS rather the proof/result/outworking/fruit (rather than the basis/grounds) of our condemnation in Adam, then inherent righteousness is the proof/result/outworking/fruit (rather than the basis/grounds) of our justification in Christ. 3b) But if inherent corruption is NOT the proof/result/outworking/fruit (but rather the basis/grounds) of our condemnation in Adam, then inherent righteousness is NOT the proof/result/outworking/fruit (but rather the basis/grounds) of our justification in Christ.

⁶³ Quote from Douglas Moo, *Romans*, p328. As the Catechism puts it: “The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression.” (*The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question #16). **OBJECTIONS TO THE CLASSICAL VIEW:** What are the major objections to the Classical View? **OBJECTION #1:** *How does this teaching of condemnation based on imputed sin fit with Scriptures such as Luke 10:28, or Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12? If we are already condemned because of Adam's imputed sin, how do we understand these Scriptures that seem to promise life to any who might keep God's commands perfectly?* **RESPONSE:** Many of these Scriptures may be taken in a hypothetical way. As Hodge puts it: “while the Pelagian doctrine is to be rejected, which teaches that each man comes into the world free from sin and free from condemnation, and stands his probation in his own person, it is nevertheless true that where there is no sin there is no condemnation. Hence our Lord said to the young man, 'This do and thou shalt live.' And hence the Apostle in the second chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, says that God will reward every man according to his works. To those who are good, He will give eternal life; to those who are evil, indignation and wrath. This is only saying that the eternal principles of justice are still in force. If any man can present himself before the bar of God and prove that he is free from sin, either imputed or personal, either original or actual, he will not be condemned. But the fact is that the whole world lies in wickedness. Man is an apostate race. Men are all involved in the penal and natural consequences of Adam's transgression. They stood their probation in him, and do not stand each man for himself.” (*Systematic Theology*, V2, p122). **OBJECTION #2:** *How does this teaching of condemnation based on imputed sin fit with Scriptures such as Romans 2:5-6 that evidently declare the truth that all men will be judged according to their own deeds (as opposed to the single deed of Adam)?* First, we would reaffirm here that we believe Scripture is declaring in Romans 5:12-21 that men are condemned solely on account of the sin of Adam imputed to them. What we can't say is that men are doubly condemned: condemned for Adam's sin but also condemned for their own sins. Because to say that would stand against the foundation of justification, as we have shown. We're condemned in Adam the same way we're justified in Christ. So, if we're condemned both on account of Adam's sin and our own sin, then the corollary truth is that we're justified both on account of Christ's righteousness as well as our own righteousness. Or, if we say that our own sins add to our condemnation, then the corollary truth is that our own righteousness adds to our justification. That's heresy. So, it's Adam's sin, and his sin alone imputed to us that condemns us. But then what do we do with the Scriptures that seem to speak of condemnation for actual sin, such as Romans 2:5-6? **RESPONSE:** There's a difference between condemnation and punishment. All men are condemned solely on account of Adam's sin—but the specific degree of punishment that men experience varies based on actual sins they commit (their deeds). As Robert Haldane says of Romans 2:5-6, “there will be a diversity of punishment, according to the number or greatness of the sins of each individual, not only as to the nature, but also the degree, of their works, good or bad; for the punishment of all will not be equal” (*Romans*, p83). This understanding lines up perfectly with the corollary truth in justification. Are there rewards in glory? Yes, rewards of grace. Are there degrees of glory? We would say yes—everyone's cup will be full but the size of the cup will differ—whether a shot-glass, a big-gulp, a barrel, a swimming pool, an ocean—the size will differ. Just as it's Adam's sin alone that condemns us, but there are *degrees of punishment* hereafter (cf. Jesus' words in Matt.11:22; Lk.10:14), which are *based on the way we live*

A FINAL SYNOPSIS OF THE DIFFERENT VIEWS OF ROMANS 5:12: “FOR ALL SINNED”

NAME OF VIEW	SYNOPSIS OF VIEW
The PELAGIAN View	Not true <i>grammatically</i> : the text doesn't say “all sin” or “all have sinned” but “all sinned” Not true <i>contextually</i> : this interpretation contradicts what Paul goes on to say in vv13-14 Not true <i>structurally</i> : this understanding is inconsistent with the heart of the passage in vv15-19 Not true <i>experientially</i> : infants die who have never sinned according to Pelagius' definition Not true <i>theologically</i> : the corollary truth is that we are justified by our own good deeds
The CORRUPTION View	Not true <i>grammatically</i> : to say that “all sinned” does not mean that “all were made corrupt” Not true <i>structurally</i> : this understanding is inconsistent with the heart of the passage in vv15-19 Not true <i>biblically</i> : the Bible teaches we are punished with corruption because of Adam's sin Not true <i>theologically</i> : the corollary truth is we are justified by becoming inherently righteous
The CLASSICAL View	TRUE <i>grammatically</i> : “all sinned” at a particular time—in and with Adam when he sinned TRUE <i>contextually</i> : what Paul goes on to say in vv13-14 fits perfectly with this interpretation TRUE <i>structurally</i> : this interpretation fits perfectly with the heart of the passage in vv15-19 TRUE <i>theologically</i> : the corollary truth is we are justified by Christ's imputed righteousness

ROMANS 5:13-14

¹³for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

¹⁴Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

Paul had just made a radical claim at the end of verse 12. And so, before he can do anything else, he has to stop and prove what he just said about imputed sin. His goal is to show that we're justified in Christ in exactly the same way we were condemned in Adam: just as we were condemned in Adam completely

our life; so too it's Christ's righteousness alone that justifies us, but there are *degrees of glory and rewards of grace* hereafter, which are *based on the way we live our life*. After all, Romans 2:5-6 doesn't say we're judged “on account of” our deeds but “according to” our deeds. The unbelieving will be punished, not on account of—but according to their sinful deeds, just as the believing will be rewarded not on account of—but according to their righteous deeds. So then, our deeds are *not* presented as *the basis* of our punishment or reward—but *rather* as that which determines *the extent*. Our actual, personal sins don't add to our condemnation—we're already condemned—but they add to the degree of punishment we'll experience in the next life. So it is with rewards of grace. Our actual, personal deeds wrought in love for the glory of God in no way add to our justification! But they do add, I believe Scripture teaches, to the degree and weight of glory we'll experience hereafter. So, dear brothers and sisters, don't think that imputation means it doesn't matter anymore how we live. It certainly does. **OBJECTION #3: What about Scriptures such as Deuteronomy 24:16 and Ezekiel 18:1-23 that say that sons will not be punished for the sins of their fathers, but rather that all will be punished for their own sins?** **RESPONSE:** Deuteronomy 24:16 says, “Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.” This verse seems to strike against the doctrine of imputation. If what we've been saying is true, how are we to explain this verse? We mentioned earlier that one basic principle in Bible interpretation is that we interpret Scriptures that are less clear in light of the Scriptures that are more clear. Well, another principle in Bible interpretation is that to really understand any particular verse in Scripture, it must be interpreted in light of the context its given. So, to really understand what Deuteronomy 24:16 is saying, we have to look at the context. And when we look at the context, what we see right away is that this verse isn't referring to imputed sin or anything of that nature at all. Deuteronomy 24 is talking about how things should operate in *civil society*. It's not talking about God's dealings with man; it's talking about capital punishment in the context of civil society. And in the context of society, sons ought not be put to death for the sins of their fathers. Here is a man who is a terrorist and has killed dozens of people. Well, what God is telling us in Deuteronomy 24:16 is that we are not permitted to execute this man's children along with him. The right way to preserve justice in civil society is to punish those alone who have committed crimes worthy of punishment. Okay. So, this passage isn't dealing with imputation at all, it's dealing with capital punishment as it relates to civil society. And we can use this same interpretative principle—understanding the context of a given verse—for the passage in Ezekiel. The context of Ezekiel is that God's people were being carted away into exile. And one of the reasons they were going into exile was because of the accumulated sins of their fathers. So a certain proverb became a popular saying, that the fathers have eaten the sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge (verse 2). In other words, our fathers sinned but we're the ones paying for it. *They* were the ones who disobeyed, but *we* are the ones going into exile. This is the context of Ezekiel 18. And what God is telling the Jews of Ezekiel's day is that it wasn't just because of the sins of their fathers that they were going into exile—it was because of their own sins. They thought themselves wholly innocent in the matter. They were full of self-righteousness. And God is confronting them with the fact that they're just as sinful and disobedient as their fathers, and that they weren't being led into exile for the sins of anyone except themselves. So, this passage in Ezekiel isn't about imputation either. It's teaching us about God's dealings with His covenant people in the course of redemptive history, and explaining why it is that the Lord at times subjects them to seasons of discipline. **OBJECTION #4: Is imputed sin fair?** It's an important objection. As one put it: “if you've never felt that, if you've never felt the force of that objection, I think it's probably because you've never thought about imputation.” We ought to feel this if we really understand imputation. We covered this last objection earlier in Lesson 2; please feel free to turn back there for review.

apart from our own actual sins, so too we're justified in Christ totally apart from our own actual righteousness (this is clear from verses 18-19). But before Paul can get there, he has to stop and prove the first premise of his argument. He has to show some evidence for the fact that all men indeed stand condemned on account of the transgression of Adam, totally apart from their personal, actual sins.⁶⁴

And this is exactly what Paul does in verses 13-14. He's going to give a “one-two punch,” to demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt, that all humanity stands condemned before God—*not* because of *their* individual sins—but because of *Adam's sin*. Paul is going to prove for us that we stand guilty before God and exposed to His punishment—not because of our own actual sins—but *because of Adam's imputed sin*.

So first, let's walk through verses 13-14, in light of verse 12, then we'll try to explain and summarize them:

Paul's PREMISE (v12): It was Adam's imputed sin that unleashed death upon the human race.

Paul's PROOF (vv13-14): For even before the Law of Moses was given, we know that sin existed, since it was being punished with death (v13a). Now, sin can't be punished where there's no law, since by definition, sin is transgression of law (v13b). And yet sin *was* being punished with the judicial penalty of death, which means that all men must be guilty of breaking a law (v14a). Now, that law, which all men must be guilty of breaking, for which reason all men are punished with death, cannot be the Law of Moses, since sin was being punished with death long before *the Law of Moses* was ever given (v14a). Neither can this law, that all men have transgressed, be *the moral law*—the law that is written on the heart of every man—since there are also some who die that have never transgressed that law either (v14b).

Paul's CONCLUSION (vv12,15-19): Thus, the law that all men have transgressed, for which all are punished with death, must be the transgression of Adam: we suffer the penalty of death because we are guilty of Adam's transgression; we suffer death because Adam's transgression has been imputed to us.

So, that's the general thrust of the text. Now let's look more in detail at Paul's two proofs for imputed sin:

1. **Paul's FIRST Argument:** The first thing Paul shows us in verses 13-14 is that all men stand condemned totally apart from actual sins committed against *the Law of Moses*. Before the Law of Moses was given, men could not be guilty of breaking that Law. Now, men could indeed be guilty of sinning against their conscience (the moral law written on their hearts)—Paul will get to that in the second part of his argument—but Paul's first point is that men who lived before the Law was given could not be said to be guilty of violating *that* Law. Paul's reasoning goes like this: if all men die (v12), and death is the enforcement of a penalty, and penalties are only given when there is violation of a law (v13), then all men must have transgressed a law (vv13-14). Now, the law which all men transgressed, on account of which the penalty of death was rendered to all, cannot be the Law of Moses, since the punishment of death was meted out long before the Law of Moses existed. There must have been the transgression of another law for which all men are exposed to God's judicial punishment—namely, the transgression of Adam. So, Paul's first argument is that actual sins *against the Law of Moses* can't account for the judicial penalty of death.

2. **Paul's SECOND Argument:** But Paul keeps going, he has one more piece of evidence for us to prove that it was Adam's sin—and not our own actual individual sins—that resulted in death and condemnation for the world. In the second part of verse 14 he adds one more insight. Death reigned, Paul says, “even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam” (v14). What does it mean to not sin in the likeness of the offense Adam? It means to not sin like Adam did. Well, how exactly did Adam sin? What type of sin was that? Well, it was an overt, willing, explicit, violation of God's will. When Adam sinned, he knew what he was doing was wrong. Now, from Adam till Moses, even though the Mosaic Law had yet to be established, still, men did have the law of God written upon their hearts. So, while they couldn't sin against the Law of Moses, they could and did sin against *God's moral law* written upon their hearts. And when they did this, they were sinning like Adam did—because they were willingly, knowingly violating what they knew to be God's will—just as Adam did. But Paul is saying here is that death reigned from Adam till Moses (and still does) even over those who didn't sin in this way.

⁶⁴ As Hodge puts it: “If verse 12 teaches that men are subject to death on account of the sin of Adam, if this is the doctrine of the whole passage, and if, as is admitted, verses 13-14 are designed to prove the assertion of verse 12, then it is necessary that the apostle should show that death comes on those who have no personal or actual sins to answer for.” (*Romans*).

Well, you ask, who in the world could Paul be talking about? Are there any people that could possibly fit this description: people given over to death, yet who had never explicitly violated God's revealed will; a group of people who had never done what they knew to be wrong? Yes—*infants*. Infants who die in the womb, or in infancy.⁶⁵ They died, and still do, even though they had never explicitly violated God's revealed will. Now, are they infected with the poison of original sin? Absolutely. But have they committed any *actual* sins, either against the Law of Moses or the moral law: knowingly, willingly violating God's will? No⁶⁶—and yet they die. Why? The only possible explanation is that death spreads to them also—not because of any actual, individual sins—but *because of imputed sin*. Death spreads to them not because of any particular sins of their own, but because of Adam's sin. Paul wants us to see that we do not share Adam's fate because we have followed his sinful pattern; or even because we have inherited his sinful nature (thought that's true); we share Adam's fate because we are held guilty in Adam's sin. We do not stand condemned because of our own particular individual sins—either against the Law of Moses or against the moral law written on our hearts; we stand condemned because Adam's sin was imputed to us.

PAUL'S LOGIC IN VERSES 12-14

PREMISE 1	All men die (vv12-13)
PREMISE 2	Death is the enforcement of a penalty (v13)
PREMISE 3	Penalties are only enforced when there is a transgression of a law (v13)
PREMISE 4	Thus, all must have transgressed a law (vv13-14)
PREMISE 5	But this law can't be the Law of Moses, since men died before the Law was given (v14)
PREMISE 6	Nor can it be the moral law, since some [infants] die who have never violated even that law (v14)
PREMISE 7	So we don't suffer death because of actual sins either against the Mosaic Law or the moral law
CONCLUSION	So then, all men are condemned on account of the sin of Adam, not their own actual sins (v12) ⁶⁷

SUMMARY: Again, to briefly summarize: The judicial sentence of condemnation and punishment of death that has come upon all men argues the breaking of a law. But actual sins against *the Law of Moses* will not account for men's condemnation and death, as men were given over to death well before the Law of Moses existed. Neither will actual sins against *the moral law* written on the heart account for it, as infants are given over to death who, though corrupted with original sin, cannot be said to have committed actual sins against the moral law. So then, the violation of the law, of which every man is guilty, for which every man is punished with death, cannot be the personal, actual sins which men commit either against the law of God written on stone tablets, or the law of God written in their own hearts. Men are condemned and punished on account of the sin of Adam, totally apart from their own actual sins.

This is confirmed by the last clause in verse 14, where Paul describes Adam as “*a type of Him who was to come*.” How is it exactly that Adam is a type of Christ? Well, “Adam is the cause of death coming on all independently of any transgressions of their own; as Christ is the author of justification without our own works. . . As Adam was the head and representative of his race, whose destiny was suspended on his conduct, so Christ is the head and representative of his people. As the sin of the one was the ground of our condemnation, so the righteousness of the other is the ground of our justification.”⁶⁸ Sweet truths. . .

⁶⁵ See Haldane, *Romans*, p210; Murray, *Romans*, p190.

⁶⁶ Matthew Poole puts it well: “dying so soon, they have neither capacity nor opportunity of committing any sin similar to [Adam's]; that is, any actual transgression; and [they are] therefore said, in that respect, to be innocent (*Jeremiah 19:4*), not free from the taint, but from the act of sin.”

⁶⁷ This chart gratefully adapted from Hodge's reasoning in his commentary on *Romans*. Hodge explains it this way: “The proof is this: the infliction of penal evils implies the violation of law; the violation of the law of Moses will not account for the universality of death, because men died before that law was given. Neither is the violation of the law of nature sufficient to explain the fact that all men are subject to death, because even those die who have never broken that law. As, therefore, death supposes transgression, and neither the law of Moses nor the law of nature embraces all the victims of death, it follows that men are subject to penal evils on account of the sin of Adam.” (*Romans*). Again, in his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge puts it this way: “Punishment supposes sin; [and] sin supposes law; for sin is not imputed where there is no law. All men are punished; they are all subject to penal evils [IE, death]. They are, therefore, all chargeable with sin, and consequently are all guilty of violation of law. That law cannot be the law of Moses, for men died (*i.e.*, were subject to the penalty of the law) before that law was given. [And] It cannot be the law as written on the heart; for those die who have never committed any personal sin [IE, infants]. . . The ground of that infliction must therefore be sought. . . in the sin of [Adam].” (p159).

⁶⁸ Hodge, *Romans*.

And here's why all of this is so important for us to understand: *As it was for us in Adam, so it is for us in Christ.* Just as we were condemned for a sin that wasn't ours—so too, we're justified for a righteousness that isn't ours. Just as we had nothing to do with the guilt we received in Adam, so too we have nothing to do with the righteousness we receive in Christ. Just as our condemnation was based solely on what Adam did, so too our justification is based solely upon what Christ has done. Just as death came to us solely because of the disobedience of Adam, so now life comes to us solely because of the obedience of Christ.

ADDENDUM: We might add that there are actually two slightly different views of what Paul is saying in verses 13-14. We've been describing what we can call the *Majority View*.⁶⁹ This is the view we judge to be the biblical view. But there's also another view we can call the *Minority View*. See the following chart:

	The MAJORITY View	The MINORITY View
SUMMARY OF THE 2 VIEWS	All men die, and death is God's penal judgment for sin, and penalties are only enforced when there is a transgression of a law, so all men must have transgressed a law. . .	All men die, and death is God's penal judgment for sin, and penalties are only enforced when there is a transgression of a law, so all men must have transgressed a law. . .
	<i>But this law that all men transgress can't be the Law of Moses, since men died before that Law was ever given; nor can it be the moral law, since some die who can't be said to have sinned against the moral law (infants). . .</i>	<i>But strictly speaking, sin (or transgression) wasn't actually possible before the Law of Moses was given, since it's impossible to sin when there are no laws to sin against, and God had yet to give His Law. And yet, men still died. . .</i>
	Thus, all men must be guilty of Adam's offense.	Thus, all men must be guilty of Adam's offense.

HOW THE VIEWS ARE SIMILAR	Both views take v12 (“all sinned”) to be referring to <i>imputed sin</i> .	
	Both views take vv13-14 to be the <i>proof</i> for what had just been said about imputed sin in v12.	
	Both views begin with the same premise (all men must have transgressed a law) and end with the same conclusion (the law all men have transgressed must be the imputed offense of Adam).	
HOW THE VIEWS ARE DIFFERENT	Before the Law, sin <i>was</i> imputed, meaning that sin was punished with the judicial penalty of death	Before the Law, sin was <i>not</i> imputed, meaning that sin didn't exist
	Those who died before the Mosaic Law <i>had</i> actual sins— <i>but</i> death came on them for another reason	Those who died before the Mosaic Law <i>didn't have</i> actual sins— <i>so</i> men did not die for actual sins
	The 2 nd clause of v13 is proving that there must have been law before the Law of Moses	The 2 nd clause of v13 is proving that actual sins could not truly exist before the Law of Moses
	Verses 13-14a: Shows that men die for reasons other than actual sins against the <i>Law of Moses</i> ; Verse 14b: Shows that men die for reasons other than actual sins against the <i>moral law</i> .	In both vv13-14a as well as v14b, Paul is showing the same thing: that men who lived before the Law of Moses was given died though they had no actual sins (against that law) to speak of.

ROMANS 5:15-17

¹⁵But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. ¹⁶The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. ¹⁷For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

1. An OVERVIEW of Romans 5:15-17: *Let's remember the context of Romans 5:15-17. . .*

“In [Romans 5:12]. . .[Paul] is concerned to pull back and give you a deeper, a broader background and understanding for what he has taught you so far. He's. . .pulling back and saying, 'Let me explain to you

⁶⁹ As far as I know, these two major views don't actually have names, but I thought it helpful to label them.

some of the underlying reasons for the purposes of God and why salvation has to be this way. Why it is that you can't save yourself. Why it is that you contribute nothing of your own righteousness to your standing of righteousness before God. Why it is that you have to look away from your works and to look to Jesus Christ.' And so, beginning in Romans, Chapter 5, verse 12, he wants to explain to you the parallels which exist between [*Christ*, on the one hand, and] our first head—our federal representative—*Adam*, who fell in his rebellion against God from the state of righteousness and grace which God had blessed him with. And he wants to compare Adam to Jesus Christ so that we might understand, first of all, something of the web of sin that we're involved in, and also some reason again for why we need to flee to Christ alone for salvation. But before he will discuss those parallels between Adam and Christ, he wants to explain a couple of other things, especially the discontinuities between Adam and Christ. He wants it to be very clear that Christ, in what He does to save us, is far more glorious and the fruit of it is far more glorious in comparison to Adam [and] the work that Adam did to bring us into this situation. . . In other words, you can't talk about Adam and Christ and compare them without drawing out the bold contrast that exists between them. And that's exactly what [Paul does here] in verses 15 through 17."⁷⁰

2. The CONTRASTS contained in Romans 5:15-17: *What are the contrasts in Romans 5:15-17?*

Verse 15: It seems that there are two main contrasts in verse 15. The first is between the *NATURE of the actions* of the two covenant heads: Adam's *transgression* is contrasted with Christ's *gift*.⁷¹ The second is between the *DEGREE of the glory of the actions* of the two covenant heads: that is, in Christ, "the grace of God not only negates the operation of judgment but abounds unto the opposite, unto justification and life."⁷² The abounding of verse 15 refers to the gift extending "not only to the recovery of what Adam lost [IE, conditional favor], but to blessings which Adam did not possess [IE, everlasting favor]."⁷³ In other words: Jesus didn't come to just make salvation *possible* again—He came to make it *certain*. He didn't just recover *what Adam had lost*—He caused us to inherit *what Adam never possessed*.

Verse 16: In this verse there also seem to be two main contrasts. The first has to do with the immediate *EFFECT of the actions* of the two covenant heads: Adam's trespass brought *condemnation*; Christ's gift brought *justification*. The second contrast has to do with the *POWER of the actions* of the two covenant heads: "Christ has done far more than remove the curse pronounced on us for the one sin of Adam; he

⁷⁰ Ligon Duncan from his course on *Covenant Theology*.

⁷¹ *Hodge here poses and answers an important question that relates to verses 15-17. On verse 15:* "It is here. . . expressly asserted that the sin of Adam was the cause of all his posterity being subjected to death, that is, to penal evil. But it may still be asked whether it was the *occasional* or the *immediate* cause. That is, whether the apostle means to say that [1] the sin of Adam was the occasion of all men being placed in such circumstances that they all sin, and thus incur death. . . that by being the cause of the corruption of their nature, it is thus *indirectly* the cause of their condemnation; or [2] whether he is to be understood as saying that his sin is the *direct* judicial ground or reason for the infliction of penal evil. . . it is a mere exegetical question. . . Does the dative here express the occasional cause, or the ground or reason of the result attributed to the offense of one man? . . . If Paul says that the offense of one is the ground and reason of the many being subject to death, he says all that the advocates of the doctrine of imputation say. . . [and] this is the strict exegetical meaning of the passage. . . This interpretation is not only possible, and in strict accordance with the meaning of the words, but it is demanded, in this connection, by the plainest rules of exposition. . ." *On verse 17:* "Here again the dative has a causal force, and the assertion of the apostle is, that the offense of Adam was the cause of death coming on all men. His sin was not the cause of death by any physical efficiency; nor as the mere occasion of leading men to incur by their own act the penalty of death; nor by corruption the nature of man, which corruption is the ground of the inflicted curse; but. . . because his sin was the ground of the judicial condemnation, which passed on all mankind." *Conclusion:* "If it is true, therefore, as is so often asserted, that the apostle here, and throughout this passage, states the fact merely that the offense of Adam has led to our condemnation, without explaining the mode in which it has produced this result, it must be because language cannot express the idea." (Hodge, *Romans*). *As Haldane also says of verse 19:* "Adam's disobedience is said not merely to be the occasion of leading his posterity into sin, but to have made them sinners. . . Mr. Stuart makes Adam's sin merely what he calls the instrumental or occasional cause. But with no propriety can Adam's sin be called the instrument by which his posterity sinned. . . an occasional cause is no cause. Every person knows the difference between a cause and an occasion. Besides, to suppose that Christ's own obedience is the real cause of our justification, and that Adam's sin is only the occasion, not properly the cause, of our condemnation, is to destroy the contrast between Adam and Christ, on which the Apostle here insists. If Christ's obedience is the ground of our justification, Adam's disobedience must, by the contrast, be the ground of our condemnation." (*Romans*, pp218-219).

⁷² Quote is from John Murray from his commentary on *Romans*, p193. Stott focuses on the contrasting *nature* of the actions; Murray on the *degree* of their glory; Moo on both. Hodge, Murray, and Moo all further point out that one major thrust of the "much more" of verses 15 and 17 has to do with the *certainly* of grace bestowed in Christ; we will discuss this later under Heading III, "The Truths Contained in Romans 5:15-17."

⁷³ From Haldane in his commentary on *Romans*, p214.

procures our justification *from our own innumerable offenses.*⁷⁴ In other words: Adam ushered in condemnation and death *by one sin*; but Christ has obtained justification and life *despite countless sins.*⁷⁵

Verse 17: The main contrast in verse 17 seems to be between the ultimate *RESULT of the actions* of the two covenant heads: the work of Adam resulted in *the reigning of death*; the work of Christ resulted in *a reigning in life*. The language here must be carefully noted; the contrast is not merely of the reigning of death and the reigning of life. In Adam, *death* reigned; but in Christ, it is not life that reigns, but *we reign in life*. “[Christ] delivers us from the rule of death so radically as to enable us to change places with it and rule over it. . . We become kings, sharing the kingship of Christ, with even death under our feet. . .”⁷⁶

THE WORK OF ADAM AND THE WORK OF CHRIST CONTRASTED IN ROMANS 5:15-17 (CHART I)

	THE WORK OF ADAM	THE WORK OF CHRIST
Its NATURE	A <i>trespass</i> that resulted in <i>merited</i> judgment (v15)	An act that resulted in <i>unmerited</i> righteousness (v15)
Its DEGREE	Far more <i>inferior</i> than that of Christ (v15a)	Far more <i>superior</i> than that of Adam (15a)
Its EFFECT	<i>Condemnation</i> for many (v16)	<i>Justification</i> for many (v16)
Its POWER	Brought condemnation & death <i>by one sin</i> (v16)	Brought justification & life <i>despite countless sins</i>
Its RESULT	The <i>reigning of death</i> (v17)	A <i>reigning in life</i> (v17)

A second chart shows most of these contrasts from a slightly different angle:

THE WORK OF ADAM AND THE WORK OF CHRIST CONTRASTED IN ROMANS 5:15-17 (CHART II)

	ITS NATURE	ITS OUTCOME	ITS EFFECT	ITS RESULT
ADAM	A Transgression	Judgment of God	Condemnation	Death
CHRIST	An Act of Grace ⁷⁷	Gift of Righteousness ⁷⁸	Justification	Life

3. The TRUTHS contained in Romans 5:15-17: *What gospel truths do we learn in Romans 5:15-17?*

As Paul draws out for us the contrasts between Adam and Christ, he also teaches us in these verses some precious truths about *God's grace*. As we meditate on verses 15-17, here's what we can see in particular:

A) These verses describe the NATURE of God's grace. When God condemned the world on account of Adam's sin, He was operating according to justice. The wages of sin is death, both for Adam and all his posterity. So, condemnation is rooted in God's *justice*. But justification is rooted in God's *grace*—something that Paul mentions *three times* in verses 15-17.⁷⁹ In Christ, God has dealt with us in a way that is utterly astonishing. It was out of sheer grace that God ever sent His Son in the first place. He wasn't obligated to do what He did; God didn't have to make a way of salvation for us. And what *manner* of grace. Again: Not coming merely to offer humanity a second chance at salvation, but coming to win it for us. Not coming just to make salvation *possible* again for sinners—but coming to make it *certain*.

⁷⁴ Quote from Hodge on his commentary on *Romans*. Stott focuses on the *effect* of the two actions; Hodge and Murray on the *power* of their actions; Moo draws out both aspects.

⁷⁵ Moo: “For the judicial verdict that resulted in condemnation was from one [transgression], but the gift that leads to justification came after many transgressions.” (p338). Murray: “Judgment. . .take[s] into account only one sin of one man and the whole race is condemned. But the free gift and justification take into account the many sins. . .of a great multitude (p196).”

⁷⁶ Quote from Stott from his commentary on *Romans*. Haldane put it this way in his commentary on *Romans*: “Believers are to be kings as well as priests. All this they are to be through the one Jesus Christ; for as they were one with Adam in his fall, so they are one with Christ in His victory and triumph.” (p215). Adding to this idea, Hodge also draws out from verse 17 insights concerning (again) the *certainty* of grace (as with verse 15), as well as the *objects* of grace, which we will also deal with below under Heading III, “The Truths Contained in Romans 5:15-17.” (from his commentary on *Romans*).

⁷⁷ The “act of grace” refers to the *redemption accomplished* through Christ's perfect life and atoning death.

⁷⁸ The “gift of righteousness” refers to the *redemption applied* by the Spirit.

⁷⁹ Murray notes in discussing verse 15 that Paul here moves “from the operation of judicial judgment to the bestowments of God's grace. . .The one sin of Adam is the judicial ground or reason for the death of the many. . .[but] the grace of God not only negates the operation of judgment but abounds unto the opposite, unto justification and life.” (*Romans*, pp192-93).

B) These verses highlight the CERTAINTY of God's grace. The “much more” of verses 15 and 17 isn't just meant to contrast the actions of Adam and Christ, but to strengthen the foundation of our assurance of salvation in Christ. This phrase “does not express a higher degree of efficacy, but of evidence or certainty. . . If the one event has happened, much more may we expect the other to occur.”⁸⁰ If *imputed sin* is a certain reality, much more is *imputed righteousness*. If it's a certainty that *all in Adam* are *condemned*, it's much more of a certainty that *all in Christ* are *justified*. If it's certain that *death reigns* over all in and through Adam, then it's all the more certain that *life reigns* over all in and through Christ.

C) These verses demonstrate the MEDIATION of God's grace. Verse 17 also makes it really clear that our justification isn't just established on the basis of Christ's righteousness—it's also *upheld through the mediation* of Christ's righteousness: “For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned *through* the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life *through* the One, Jesus Christ.” Our reigning in life isn't just grounded upon Jesus' righteousness; it's also perpetually upheld through the mediation of His righteousness. In other words, Jesus didn't just accomplish salvation for us—He continues to perpetually uphold that salvation.⁸¹ So, our victory in the Christian life isn't contingent on us at all; but on the perpetual mediation of the righteousness of Christ.⁸²

D) These verses define the RECIPIENTS of God's grace. Some people use verses 15-19 to defend universalism, teaching that just as Adam's sin brought condemnation *to all* (without distinction), so too Christ's righteousness brings justification *to all* (without distinction). But this view not only contradicts the teaching of Scripture in general; it also opposes the particularity of salvation taught in this very passage. In verse 17 Paul makes clear that it is not all men in general who are justified, but a particular group of people. It is only “*those who receive* the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness” that will reign in life through Jesus Christ. So, God's grace is a gift that must be received through faith in Christ.

ROMANS 5:18-19

¹⁸So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. ¹⁹For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

1. The CONTEXT of Romans 5:18-19:

Let's briefly review the context of verses 18-19 in relation to the whole passage of 5:12-21. The parallel between Adam and Christ that Paul had begun to make in verse 12 is finally brought to its full and intended completion here in verses 18-19. The truth that Paul draws out here in verses 18-19 is the same truth he had begun to declare in verse 12. The “just as” of verse 12 finally finds its corollary comparison in the “so then/even so” of verse 18. Paul had begun to talk about *Adam's imputed sin* in verse 12 and his design was to make a parallel comparison to *Christ's imputed righteousness*—to show that we are *justified in Christ* in exactly the same way that we were *condemned in Adam*. But before Paul can come to the second part of the comparison, he realizes that he has to clarify a few things. Before he can get to talking about imputed righteousness, he realizes he has to say a few more things about imputed sin.

First, he realizes that, just like today, there would be people in his day that would be skeptical about the doctrine of imputed sin. There would be people who didn't like it; people who wouldn't agree with it. So before he can say anything else, the first thing he does is take some time to prove the doctrine of imputed sin; and that's exactly what he does in verses 13-14. And he proves it by showing that: 1) all men suffer the judicial penalty of death; 2) which means that all men are guilty of violating a law; 3) but this law cannot be the Law of Moses, since multitudes died well before the Mosaic Law was ever given; 4) nor can

⁸⁰ Hodge, *Romans*.

⁸¹ As Isaiah 9:7, “. . .to establish it *and to uphold it* with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. . .”

⁸² Murray: “the apostle asserts that not only did death reign by reason of 'the trespass of the one' but also through the mediacy of the one. Adam sustained such a relationship to the human race that through him death exercised its universal sway over men. . .the same type of relationship to Christ for those reigning in life is assumed as obtains between Adam and those over whom death reigns. The permanency of the mediation of Christ. . .[is] the condition of the reign in life.” (pp197-98).

this law be the moral law written on the hearts of all men, since infants die—who though corrupted with original sin—cannot be said to have committed any actual sins. So, it can't be because of *actual* sins that men are condemned and punished—either actual sins committed against *the Law of Moses*, or actual sins committed against *the moral law*. Rather, all of us stand guilty and condemned before God on account of the sin of Adam. As the covenant head and representative of all his posterity, his transgression has been counted as ours, his disobedience has been reckoned to you and I, his sin has been imputed to us.

Next, after proving the doctrine of imputed sin in verses 13-14, Paul feels that he must first contrast Adam and Christ before he can compare them. This he does in verses 15-17. Again, he wants to show us that we're justified in Christ in exactly the same way we were condemned in Adam. But before Paul can get to comparing Adam and Christ, he wants to show us that in a very real sense, they are infinitely incomparable: Adam brought God's *judgment* to men; Christ has brought God's *righteousness* to them. Adam brought *condemnation*; Christ has brought *justification*. Adam brought us *death*; Christ has brought us *life*. Adam plunged the whole world into condemnation and death *through his one sin*; but Christ has brought justification and life to the many *even despite our own innumerable personal sins*.

Now that Paul has given us ample proof for the doctrine of imputed sin (vv13-14), and has drawn out the infinite contrasts that exist between Adam and Christ (vv15-17), he's finally ready, here in verses 18-19, to complete the comparison he had begun back in verse 12: “[just] as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, *even so* through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.” What is Paul telling us? We've been hinting at it for a while, now it's time to explain it.

2. The MEANING of Romans 5:18-19:

Throughout this passage, Paul has been relentless in his declaration of imputed sin. He actually refers to this doctrine of imputed sin no less than *six times* over the course of the passage:

- Verse 12: “through one man sin entered into the world. . .and so death spread to all men,” . . .
- Verse 15: “by the transgression of the one the many died,” . . .
- Verse 16: “the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation,” . . .
- Verse 17: “by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one,” . . .
- Verse 18: “through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men,” . . .
- Verse 19: “through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners” . . .

And now we can see that the whole purpose for Paul showing us so emphatically the reality of *imputed sin in Adam* is to help us see the parallel glories of *imputed righteousness in Christ*. You see, Paul had all kinds of opponents who were going around preaching a gospel of *Jesus—plus* salvation: Jesus *plus* circumcision, Jesus *plus* keeping the Law, Jesus *plus* something else you have to do; and what Paul is doing here is showing the world that the Scriptures teach a gospel of Jesus *plus nothing*. Salvation is *by grace alone*, and it's *based on Jesus alone* and has nothing to do with you at all. One preacher put it this way: “Look at yourself in Adam; though you had done nothing you were declared a sinner. Look at yourself in Christ; and see that though you have done nothing, you are declared to be righteous. That is the parallel.”⁸³ This is the very heart of the gospel. Just as you were condemned in Adam totally apart from what you did or didn't do—so too you are justified in Christ totally apart from what you do or don't do. Just as in Adam we were condemned *solely* because of what Adam had done, so now in Christ we stand justified *solely* because of what Christ has done. This is Paul is wanting to show us in verses 18.

And just in case we somehow missed Paul's point in verse 18, he reiterates it once again for us in verse 19. Though the language is different in verse 19, the structure and doctrine remain essentially the same.

PAUL'S COMPARISONS IN VERSE 18

THE OBJECTS	THE REALITY	THE BASIS
Just as all [<i>in Adam</i>]	have been condemned	on account of the transgression of Adam
So too, all [<i>in Christ</i>]	have been justified	on account of the righteousness of Christ

⁸³ From Lloyd-Jones in *V4*.

PAUL'S COMPARISON IN VERSE 19

THE OBJECTS	THE REALITY	THE BASIS
Just as the many <i>[in Adam]</i>	were made ⁸⁴ sinners	on account of the disobedience of Adam
So too, the many <i>[in Christ]</i>	will be made ⁸⁵ righteous	on account of the obedience of Christ

ROMANS 5:20-21

²⁰*The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

1. THE ROLE OF GOD'S LAW (5:20a): *There's four things we need to mention here about the Law:*

A) The MEANING of the Law: It may seem obvious to some, but it's important to note that the law that Paul is speaking about here is *the Mosaic Law*. There are some who maintain that Paul is referring not only to the Mosaic Law but to the moral law. But the moral law has been written on the heart of man since the dawn of creation. Paul is speaking exclusively about *the Law of Moses*—which did not enter into the world until a later time in redemptive history; hence Paul's words: “the law came in. . .” (v20).

B) The REFERENCE to the Law: We might ask, why would Paul finish his discussion of the parallels between Adam and Christ with the Law? What in the world does the Law have to do with imputed sin in Adam and imputed righteousness in Christ? Well, that's actually a good question. A really important question. It was a question Paul wanted to ask his hearers. Because the context in which Paul lived and ministered was a Jewish context. He was always responding to the questions that came from the Jews. Throughout the book of Romans, Paul is constantly answering the objections that would inevitably come from the doctrines he was expounding.⁸⁶ And it seems that this is exactly what he's doing here. As he finishes his discussion, he can imagine how contemporary Jews might object to what he had just said. He knows that some of them would object to what he just said about our need for Christ by making the claim that God sent *the Law* in order to restore righteousness (see Galatians 3). And so Paul feels the need here to address a truth that is vitally important: just how is it that the Law relates to our salvation? And what Paul says is that the purpose of the Law was never to increase *our righteousness*—it was actually to increase *our sin*: “The Law came in *so that the transgression would increase*” (5:20). In other words, the Law was never meant to *make us righteous*—it was actually given to do the opposite: *to show us just how sinful we really are*. Paul wants his hearers to understand that the Law was never meant to be our Savior.

So, that's why Paul is bringing up the Law of Moses here at the end of this passage. Now, there's two things in particular that we need to mention here as we talk about Paul's reference to the Law:⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Since the verb behind the phrase “made sinners” and “made righteous” (*kathistami*) is literally “to appoint; constitute,” these phrases are better rendered “constituted to be sinners” or “constituted to be righteous,” as they are—just as in verse 18—referring to the forensic reality of imputed righteousness; that people are inaugurated into a state of sin/righteousness (see Jms.4:4; 2Pet.1:8 for same Greek verb). Hodge says: “It is not our personal righteousness which makes us righteous, but the imputation of the obedience of Christ. And the sense in which we are here declared to be sinners, is not that we are such personally (which indeed is true), but by the imputation of Adam's disobedience.” Murray: “this involvement must be interpreted in forensic terms. Our involvement [in Adam's sin] cannot be that of personal voluntary transgression on our part. It can only be that of imputation. . .[and] The same principle of solidarity that appears in our relation to Adam, and by reason of which we are involved in his sin, obtains in our relation to Christ. . .just as the relation to Adam means the imputation to us of his disobedience, so the relation to Christ means the imputation to us of his obedience.” (pp205-206). Moo: “Some argue that [the verb here] means nothing more than 'make.' But this translation misses the forensic flavor of the word. It often means 'appoint,' and probably refers here to the fact that people are 'inaugurated into' the state of sin/righteousness. . .This 'making righteous'. . .must be interpreted in the light of Paul's typical forensic categories. To be 'righteous' does not mean to be morally upright, but to be judged acquitted, cleared of all charges, in the heavenly judgment.” (p345).

⁸⁵ See previous footnote on the Greek verb *kathestami*.

⁸⁶ See for instance Romans 3:1,3,5,8,31; 4:1; 6:1,15; 7:7,13; etc.

⁸⁷ These two truths gratefully gleaned from Ligon Duncan's course on *Covenant Theology*.

1) **FIRST**, Paul's reference here to the Law is **PARTIAL**: This is not everything that Paul says about the Law. His mention here about the Law is not meant to be a comprehensive treatment on the nature and purposes of the Law. He says a lot more about the Law in a lot of other places in Scripture.⁸⁸ So, don't think that Paul is implying here, for instance, that the Law's only purpose is to bring unbelievers to faith in Christ, but that it has no role in the life of a New Testament believer. Paul's not saying that. He's simply describing here for us *one* specific purpose of the Mosaic Law—namely, to drive sinners to Christ.

2) **SECOND**, Paul's reference here to the Law is **PROVOCATIVE**: Paul's statement here about the Law would have been incredibly offensive to the ears of many of his contemporary Jewish hearers. Why? Because ethnic Jews prided themselves on the fact that of all the nations on the earth, God had chosen them to be His people and had given them His Law. And Paul's saying, look, the reason God gave you the Law wasn't to vindicate your righteousness—it was to expose your sin; it wasn't to show the world how wonderfully righteous you are—it was actually to show you how wretchedly messed up you are. What Paul says here is shocking. And *he means* for it to be shocking. He wants to shock his hearers into life.

C) **The PURPOSE of the Law**: Again, the Law was never meant to be our Savior. It was meant to *lead us* to the Savior but it was never meant to *be* our Savior. It was never meant to restore Adam's fallen, sinful race to God. The ten commandments were never meant to save us.⁸⁹ But if the Law was never meant to save us, what *was* it meant to do? Paul tells us in Romans 5:20, “The Law came in *so that the transgression would increase*.”⁹⁰ Now, biblical scholars and theologians will tell you that the “so that” of this clause is a “so that” of *purpose* or *design*.⁹¹ Paul's saying here that the Law was given with a purpose—but that its purpose was actually *to increase transgression*—NOT to remove or lessen it. The purpose of the Law was *not to remedy* the disaster Adam created—it was actually *to make it worse*. The Law wasn't meant *to remove* the judgment that came upon us through Adam's sin—it was meant *to increase* it. The Law wasn't given *to save us*, but to *further condemn us*. God gave us the Law to *convict* us of our sin and to *show* us just how sinful we really are, in order to *drive* us to Christ to find salvation in Him alone.

D) **The METHOD of the Law**: So again—we need to be absolutely clear on this—the Law is not our Savior and it was never meant to be. Rather, the Law was given in order to multiply and aggravate our sin, so that we would flee to Jesus, the Savior for sinners.⁹² But *how* exactly does the Law do this?⁹³

⁸⁸ See Romans 7; Galatians 3:17-25; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; and 1 Timothy 1:8-11. We'll talk more about this later.

⁸⁹ Ligon Duncan puts it in his course on Covenant Theology: “The law, coming along in the time of Moses, does not solve that problem that Adam plunged you into. The coming of the law with Moses was not God's great solution to the Adamic problem of sin, God's great solution to the Adamic problem of sin was Christ and grace.”

⁹⁰ One question that arises here is: *When Paul says, “so that the transgression would increase”, is he speaking of the one transgression of Adam, or transgressions in general?* Ultimately, both these views seem to lead to the same conclusion. If we take the first position, that Paul is speaking of the transgression of Adam, and we ask: How can it be that the Law increased Adam's transgression? The only reasonable answer is that the Law increased *the continuing effects* of Adam's transgression; IE, it increased the many and various actual sins that would spring forth from Adam's one transgression. Which means that the Law was given in order to make *actual sins* increase; which, is just another way of saying that the Law was given in order that transgressions in general would increase, which is, in fact, the second view. So, both views seem to express the same truth.

⁹¹ IE, Hodge on Romans 5:20; Murray, p208; Moo, p347.

⁹² Hodge puts it this way: “It was not intended to give life, but to prepare men to receive Christ as the only source of righteousness and salvation.” (from his commentary on *Romans*).

⁹³ Along with emphasizing that *the Law SHOWS us our sin* as well as *STIRS UP our sin* (below), some also add to these two aspects an additional third notion; namely: *The Law MULTIPLIES our Sin*: When God, through His Law, begins to show us our sin, we not only begin to possess a greater *apprehension* of it—we also begin to come under a greater *accountability* for it. When God, through His Law, begins to unfold for us what His perfect standard for mankind really is, we're not just *confronted* with how sinful we really are—we're also *held accountable* for what we've now come to know: As Murray says: “The more explicit the revelation of law the more heinous and aggravated are the violations of it.” (*Romans*, p208). So, it's not just that *the Law increases our knowledge of sin*—but that *our sin is increased by the knowledge of the Law*. As Hodge says (*Romans*): “the result of the introduction of the law was the increase of sin. This result is to be attributed partly to the fact, that by enlarging the knowledge of the rule of duty, responsibility was proportionably increased [cf. 4:15], and partly to the consideration that the enmity of the heart is awakened by its operation, and transgressions actually multiplied [cf. 7:8].” It does seem important to stress that the increasing of the transgression must, at the least, mean more than (but not less than) the fact that the Law shows us our sin. Why? Moo says (347-48) that the corollary increasing grace later in verse 20 would seem to necessitate sin actually increasing; IE, if Paul is only saying that we *apprehend our sin* more and more, it seems then that the increasing grace would mean only that we *apprehend grace* more and more. And at the least, if the first clause means nothing

1) *FIRST*, the Law *SHOWS* us our sin: The Law shows us how sinful we really are. James likens the Law to a *mirror*—you look at it and see yourself—and its not a pretty picture! “The law [does] not put sin into the heart, but it [is] an instrument to display the depravity already existing in the heart.”⁹⁴ The Law exposes our sin for what it really is—and in doing so it confronts us with just how sinful we really are.⁹⁵

I absolutely love how Martin Luther describes it: “As long as a person is not a murderer, adulterer, [or] thief, he would swear that he is righteous. How is God going to humble such a person except by the Law? The Law is the hammer of death, the thunder of hell, and the lightning of God's wrath to bring down the proud. . . When the Law was instituted on Mount Sinai it was accompanied by lightning, by storms, by the sound of trumpets, to tear to pieces that monster called self-righteousness. . . The Gospel of the free forgiveness of sins through Christ will never appeal to the self-righteous. This monster of self-righteousness, this stiff-necked beast, needs a big axe. And that is what the Law is, a big axe.”⁹⁶

2) *SECOND*, the Law *STIRS* up our sin: This is the second way that the Law causes sin to increase (5:20), and thus drives men to Christ. Paul talks about this more in Romans 7:7-8: *‘Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’*⁸ *But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.*

Now, in the first verse (v7), Paul is referring to how the Law *shows us* our sin: “I would not have come to know sin except through the Law.” This is the Law acting like a mirror, exposing sin for what it really is. But in the second verse (v8), Paul is referring to how the Law actually *stirs up* our sin: “But sin. . . *produced in me* coveting of every kind.” Sin is being stirred up, it's being provoked by the Law. The last clause, “for apart from the law sin is dead” doesn't mean that sin is actually non-existent before the Law; but that sin is inactive and dormant before being confronted with the Law. In other words, sin is there—you just can't detect it. But when a sinner is confronted with the law, sin is provoked and comes alive.

So, according to Scripture, the Law doesn't just show us our sin—it stirs it up. *Think of your children.* The Law stirs up our sin in a similar way that our children do. Now, children are a good thing, they are a blessing; just like the Law. But what happens when you start having them? More and more of your sin begins to come to the surface! Before you had children, you never struggled with things like anger or impatience. But now you're repenting of those things daily. What happened? Your sin and selfishness were there before, but they were dormant. Your sin of selfishness wasn't being challenged, it wasn't being provoked. It took children to draw it out, to provoke it, to stir it up. Caring for small children causes us to love in ways that are much more sacrificial than our flesh wants to. And so children—in themselves a good thing, a blessing—become a means of provoking our dormant, sleeping sins to new life. In a very real sense, God gives us children for the same reason He gave us the Law: to stir up our sin in order to show us our (continual) need for Christ. We could paraphrase it this way: Our children came in so that transgression would increase—but *praise God*—where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.⁹⁷

more than: “The Law came in so that knowledge of our sin would increase”, then the first part of the second clause must mean: “*but where knowledge of our sin increased, grace abounded all the more.*” The passage can't mean less than this, *but it must mean so much more.* It's not just the increase of the knowledge of sin that's met and defeated by grace—it's the increase of sin itself. So, another way to describe how the Law causes the transgression to increase, is that through the Law, our sin is: 1) APPREHENDED more and more; 2) ACCUMULATED more and more; and 3) AGGRAVATED more and more.

⁹⁴ From Haldane in his commentary on *Romans*, p228. Note: the quote is in the past tense; I put it into the present tense. Another illustration might be *light* (cf. Proverbs 6:23): light doesn't *make* your house dirty! Rather, it *shows* you that it's dirty.

⁹⁵ An interesting side-note here: Ligon Duncan points out in his course on Covenant Theology that the Greek word used in Galatians 3:24 to describe the Law as a “*tutor* to lead us to Christ,” (Gr. *paidagogos*) was a term used for the household slave who took the children to school: “he's the one who led you to the one who was going to give you what you need. . . Paul is saying that the revelation of the law that God granted to us especially in the days of Moses was designed to show us our sin, not to be the instrument of salvation. It's not our Savior; but if properly understood, *it leads us to* our Savior.”

⁹⁶ From his commentary on *Galatians*.

⁹⁷ What Luther says here about the Law fits perfectly (and humorously) with our analogy of children: “Before that he was a very holy man; he worshipped and praised God; he bowed his knees before God and gave thanks, like the Pharisee.” But now it is very different!! (quote from commentary on *Galatians*). The analogy isn't perfect, but I believe it's fair. It might be objected that the Law stirs up sin *because* it obligates us to obey new requirements, but we can also say the same of children, for now we are obligated to perform duties that were never before required of us. We must note here also that as it relates to both God's Law and our children, this is not by any means the *only* purpose. We mentioned earlier that this is just one purpose God has for the Law—it's by no means the only purpose. And the same is true for our children: I am by no means

2. THE WONDER OF GOD'S GRACE (5:20b-21):

Paul had just told us in the first clause of Romans 5:20 (v20a) that the reason God gave the Law was to *increase transgression* by both *showing us* our sin and *stirring up* our sin. But, praise God, this isn't the end of the story. In the rest of the passage (vv20b-21), which completes the entire section of verses 12-21, Paul is going to show us that even though transgression increased through the coming of the Law, grace increased all the more. Paul wants us to see that even though *sin has abounded* through the coming of the Law, *grace has super-abounded* through the coming of Christ. This last portion of Scripture contained in vv20b-21 can be broken down into five distinct points; we'll take them one by one:

- A) The **REALITY** of God's super-abounding grace: "*Grace abounded all the more. . .*" (v20b)
- B) The **PURPOSE** of God's super-abounding grace: "*. . .so that grace would reign. . .*" (v21)
- C) The **SOURCE** of God's super-abounding grace: "*through [Christ's] righteousness. . .*" (v21)
- D) The **RESULT** of God's super-abounding grace: "*. . .[un]to eternal life. . .*" (v21)
- E) The **BASIS** of God's super-abounding grace: "*through Jesus Christ our Lord*" (v21)

A) *The REALITY of abounding grace: "GRACE ABOUNDED. . ."*

We read in Romans 5:20, "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; *but where sin increased, grace abounded⁹⁸ all the more. . .*" God's reaction to abounding sin was *super-abounding* grace.⁹⁹ Now, this was true *historically*, with Israel. The Law came in; and showed them just how perfect God's standard for righteousness really is, and they were confronted with just how far they fell short. If they were a proud people before, who looked down on others, God's Law humbled them to the core. But even where their sin was multiplied and aggravated the most; and even where God's Law confronted them with the worst of their hypocrisy, idolatry, and self-centeredness—even *there* grace abounded all the more. Even in the depths of the very worst of their sin, God's grace was more than sufficient for them.

And this wasn't just true historically for Israel, *it's still just as true for us today*. And not just at conversion—but *every day in the Christian life*. The Law continues (doesn't it?) to confront us, even now as Christians, with the fact that we're much worse off than we'd like to admit. What do you do, when God takes you through seasons in your life when you just feel utterly wretched? When you just feel like a big pile of sin? What do you do on those days where you feel like instead of pushing ahead in *holiness*, all you seem to be doing is falling back into *sin*? You go to this verse, that's what you do. It doesn't say: "but where sin *decreased*, grace abounded all the more." That's what we tend to think: Grace abounds to the degree that we're doing well in the Christian life. But no; it says: "where sin *increased*." In other words, grace doesn't just abound on the days when we feel like we're doing great in the Christian life; where sin is *decreasing*. Now, God doesn't want us to sin. But what this text is teaching us is that grace abounds *even where sin is increasing*; even in those places or seasons of our life when we're most overcome by our sin. "Where sin increased"—the very place where sin is at its worst—it is precisely *there* that grace abounds.¹⁰⁰

B) *The PURPOSE of abounding grace: Grace abounded "SO THAT GRACE WOULD REIGN. . ."*

We read in Romans 5:20-21, ". . .but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, *so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign* through righteousness to eternal life. . ." Back in verses 14 and 17, Paul had told us that "death reigned" through Adam. Death had completely dominated us. This

saying that this is the only reason that God gives us children! But, in my experience at least, it is truly one of His purposes.

⁹⁸ Literally, "super-abounded."

⁹⁹ Moo puts it this way: "the law's negative purpose in radicalizing the power of sin has been more than fully met by the provisions of God's grace." (from his commentary on *Romans*).

¹⁰⁰ A fitting illustration of all this might be how Elijah poured out buckets of water on the altar in order to demonstrate and put on display all the more the awesome power of God (1 Kings 18). God's grace is not so limited that it can only exist where there is only a little sin—the power of His grace is so great that it reigns even in the midst of the worst of our sin: Murray says: "The apostle construes the multiplying of trespass which the giving of the law promoted as magnifying and demonstrating the superabounding riches of divine grace. The more transgression is multiplied and aggravated the greater is the grace that abounds unto justification and the more the lustre of that grace is made manifest." (*Romans*, p208). And Duncan says: "The more sin is multiplied, the more it is shown to us, the more aware we become of it, the more aggravated it is, the greater is the grace that conquers it. . .The reign of sin is trumped by the triumph of grace. Grace meets sin head on, and it defeats it."

is one of the things the genealogy of Genesis 5 is meant to show us. Even as Moses traces the godly line of Seth, he has to keep writing, “and he died. . .and he died. . .and he died.” In verses 14 and 17 it was *death* that reigned; Paul's focus there was the *result* of imputed sin: *Death* dominates us. But here in Romans 5:21, Paul changes the focus. Here Paul says that *sin reigned* in death. Paul's focus here is the *power of* imputed sin: *Sin* dominates us. In Adam, sin always defeats you, sin always triumphs over you, sin always owns you, sin always reigns over you. In Adam, sin completely and utterly dominates you.

SCRIPTURE	PHRASE	EMPHASIS	MEANING
ROMANS 5:14,17	“death reigned”	The <i>result</i> of Adam's imputed sin	Death dominates us in Adam
ROMANS 5:21	“sin reigned [in death]”	The <i>power</i> of Adam's imputed sin	Sin dominates us in Adam

But now, in Christ, grace has abounded all the more, “so that. . .grace would reign.” Now, this is important. Notice, it *doesn't* say, “so that WE would reign,” but rather: “so that GRACE would reign.” It's not WE who reign—it's GRACE that reigns. It's not saying that sin used to defeat us, but now WE defeat our sin. It's not saying that WE now triumph over our sin—it's saying that GRACE now triumphs over our sin. Which is a really good thing, because, if we're honest, there's lots of times we still feel pretty defeated by our sin (right?). But that doesn't matter, because our conquering isn't dependent on us. Even when we feel defeated by our sin, we still overwhelmingly triumph, because it's GRACE that reigns.

Sin had dominated us in Adam. But Paul tells us that grace abounded all the more, “so that. . .grace would reign. . .” Paul's saying: *grace abounded so that grace would reign*. And how would it reign? “Grace abounded. . .so that, *as sin reigned* in death, *even so* grace would reign. . .” We've spent a lot of time in this lesson looking at the “just as. . .even so” parallel in verses 12 and 18-19. Well, here in this last verse, there's another “just as, even so”: Grace abounded, “so that, *[just]* as sin reigned in death, *even so* grace would reign. . .to eternal life”. In other words, in Christ, grace now reigns *in the same way* that sin used to reign in Adam. Well, how was it that Adam's sin reigned in death? It reigned *every time*. Adam's sin *always* produced death. It *always* dominated; it *always* reigned. Well, that's the way that grace reigns now: In Adam, you were *always* defeated by sin; but now in Christ, sin is *always* defeated by God's grace. Sin had *always* reigned in Adam. But now it's grace that *always* reigns. Sin had dominated you in Adam *every time*; but now it's grace that *always* dominates in Christ. Simply put, grace abounded so that we wouldn't have to be a people defeated by sin anymore.¹⁰¹ Grace abounded in order that we would no longer be a people *overwhelmingly conquered by sin*, but now a people who *overwhelmingly conquer by and because of grace*. Grace abounded, “so that grace would reign. . .through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

C) The SOURCE of abounding grace: Grace abounded “so that grace would reign THROUGH RIGHTEOUSNESS. . .”

Paul goes on: “grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign *through righteousness*. . .” The righteousness Paul is talking about here is the same righteousness he had called “the gift of righteousness” in verse 17 of our passage, and the same righteousness he's been speaking about throughout the book of Romans (see 1:17; 3:21-22; 10:3).¹⁰² It's not the righteousness that God *requires* of us, but the righteousness that He *has provided* for us. It is God's very own righteousness, the “righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Philippians 3:9).

This clause reminds us what the power of grace *hinges upon*. It's wonderful news that grace reigns. But again, if this reigning grace depends in any way upon *us*, it's no good news at all. If grace reigns *only as we follow Jesus with perfect obedience*—if grace reigns *only when we're doing great spiritually*—then there's no hope for us at all. But what Paul's telling us here is that grace is rooted—not in our own righteousness—but *in the righteousness of Christ*. Just as Adam's sin mediated the curse to us, so now it's Christ's righteousness that mediates the blessing. Grace isn't based upon our subjective righteousness, but the eternal, unchanging righteousness of Jesus Christ—the same yesterday, today, and forever. Grace is

¹⁰¹ Paul is not talking about *feeling* defeated by sin—he's talking about actually *being* defeated by sin. Paul's not dealing with our subjective feelings—he's dealing with objective realities. This is vital. While still in our sins, we may not necessarily have *felt* defeated, but we were. So too, we may not always *feel* that we're more than conquerors in Christ, but the reality is, *we are*.

¹⁰² And Paul wasn't the first one to talk about it. Isaiah spoke of it hundreds of years before, often equating it to the Lord's salvation (Isaiah 45:8; 46:12-13; 51:5-8; 56:1; 59:16-17; 63:1). The Psalms are also full of the language of God's righteousness.

founded upon a righteousness that never wanes (Isaiah 51:6) and endures forever (Isaiah 51:8); a righteousness that is not only perfectly complete but completely unchangeable: Grace hinges upon the righteousness of our Savior: As Jeremiah 33:16 says, “In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she will be called: *the Lord is our righteousness.*”¹⁰³

D) The RESULT of abounding grace: Grace abounded “so that grace would reign through righteousness [UN]TO ETERNAL LIFE. . .”

Eternal life is the outcome of the reign of grace. And it's not just *one* possible outcome among many. It's *the only possible outcome* for all who are in Christ. Grace won't just reign for a short season, or up to a certain point—grace will reign “unto eternal life.” For sinners who trust in Christ, eternal life isn't just a good possibility; it is an absolute certainty. In Christ, you and I have a standing infinitely more secure than Adam had before the fall. Jesus didn't just bring us back to the glory we had in the garden of Eden. He did so much more. He didn't just give us a second chance at salvation through the cross; He won it for us. He didn't come just to make salvation *possible* again; He came to make it *certain*.

It might be asked here that if through Adam the many were sentenced to physical death as well as eternal death, then why is it not the case that believers in Christ—though delivered from eternal death—are still liable to physical death? If what Adam did brought physical death as well as eternal death into the world, should it not be the case that what Christ did would grant physical life as well as eternal life? Why is it then that believers still die physically? Paul is going to answer this question later, in Romans 8:10-11. In short, God *will* “give life to [our] mortal bodies,” — but not until the resurrection. When Paul describes Christ's resurrection as the “first fruits” of those who have died in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:20ff), he's saying that Christ's bodily resurrection is the guarantee of our bodily resurrection. As believers, we'll still have to pass through the *reality* of physical death, but praise God, the *sting* of death has been taken away.

A story is told of a pastor who was driving his car on the way to perform a funeral service; thinking through what he was going to say. As he's driving, out of nowhere—*bam*—he feels a shot of pain shoot up his leg, and he realizes that there's an unhappy bee flying around in his car. He looks down at his leg and sure enough, there's a big welt, with the stinger still stuck in the skin; and the bee is still in the car, buzzing all around like it's going to sting him again. He starts to get flustered, but all of a sudden he realizes—*the bees stinger is gone*. It can make all this noise and keep buzzing around, but it can't hurt me—the sting is gone.¹⁰⁴ And this is exactly what's true for believers. Christ took the sting of death in our place. We'll have to face death one day, but praise be to God, in Christ the *sting* of death is gone: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sting, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

E) The BASIS of abounding grace: Grace abounded “so that grace would reign through righteousness [un]to eternal life THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.”

This is it. This is the end of the passage, and the end of this section of Scripture, Romans 5:12-21. Paul closes it all with these words. Grace abounded, he says, “so that grace would reign through righteousness [un]to eternal life *through Jesus Christ our Lord.*” It's all because of Jesus. He did it all.

You all know the story of David and Goliath. I don't know how you've heard it preached before. Maybe you've heard preachers tell you that you need to be brave like David and defeat the Goliath's in your life. Maybe you yourself have preached messages like that from this story. But let me suggest to you what I think this narrative is really about: the story of David and Goliath is the story of Jesus and the gospel.

God's people were helpless and hopeless before their enemy. Goliath owned them. But just when it seemed there was no hope, something happened. A father sent his son to his own kinsmen, to seek their welfare. Some of his own kinsmen were jealous of him, scolded him, and hated him for his words. But he delivered them from the hand of the strong enemy. David single-handedly ran to the battle line; this

¹⁰³ Hodge puts it this way: “As the triumph of sin over our race was through the offense of Adam, so the triumph of grace *is through the righteousness of Christ.*” (from his commentary on *Romans*).

¹⁰⁴ Illustration taken from Phil Smuland, Romans 5:12-19 (a sermon), Covenant PCA, Harrisonburg, VA.

was a battle he would fight alone. David alone conquered the enemy, but when he did, it meant victory for *all* God's people. His victory was their victory. Does this sound familiar? This is the story of the gospel: "Jesus is the ultimate champion, our true champion, who did not merely risk his life for us, but who gave it. And now his victory is our victory, and all he has accomplished is imputed to us."¹⁰⁵

VII. A Final Word of Application from Romans 5:12-21

Don't we so often live like we're under the Covenant of Works instead of the Covenant of Grace? Don't we so often live as though our relationship with God was based on what we do or don't do? On how good we're living the Christian life? Don't we so often live as though our acceptance with God was based on our day-to-day obedience? Don't we so often live as though there *was* no Covenant of Grace?¹⁰⁶

But what does God's Word say? What this whole passage has been telling us, is that the entire human race was condemned *in Adam*. And the condemnation that came upon all humanity wasn't contingent upon the actions of anyone but Adam. The condemnation that came upon all men was based solely, exclusively, entirely—upon the action of one man, Adam. That's what Paul is saying. You could be in Adam and have a million actual sins that you committed personally, or you could be in Adam and have zero sins that you committed personally (that's Paul's whole point in 5:12-14) and you would be equally condemned. The condemnation isn't based on you at all. And you know what? The same is true for you, Christian, in Jesus. Your justification isn't based on you at all. In Adam all are condemned solely because of what Adam did. But now, in Christ, all are justified solely because of what Christ has done. *We were condemned for a sin that wasn't our own—and we're justified for a righteousness that isn't our own.* This is the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ. It's the sweetest thing in the world.

There's a true story of a very rich man who married later in life and had just one son. Shortly after his marriage, his wife fell sick and died. His son also died within just a few years of his wife's death. Finally, the rich man himself died, literally from a broken heart, according to historians. There was an auction to sell off his entire estate; and a lot of people came to bid on his property and belongings. The auctioneer began by reading a clause in the will of the deceased, that the first thing to be sold would be a particular painting of this man's son. There wasn't anything necessarily special about the painting; so no one was really interested. But one of the maids of the rich man, who had known his son, and known her master's love for his son and all the grief he had gone through, bid what she could on the painting. No one outbid her; so she won the painting. The auctioneer then came up to the platform again. He banged his gavel and announced to everyone's surprise that the auction was now closed. *He then began to read the rest of the will. As it turned out, the rich man had written in his will that the person who bought the painting of his son would also be given the entirety of his estate. Whoever gets the son, gets the fortune.*¹⁰⁷ And, my dear friends, if you belong to Jesus Christ, this is exactly what is true for you. Whoever gets the Son, gets the fortune: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:22).

¹⁰⁵ Quote from Tim Keller, *Center Church*, pp78-79. There's another striking illustration of all that we have been talking about in Joshua 3 and 4. These chapters describe for us how Joshua and all Israel with him crossed over the Jordan River in order to enter in to the land of promise, the land of Canaan. All God's people were standing on the eastern banks of the Jordan, and the Jordan stood in the way between God's people and the promised land. Jordan means "flowing downward," and the Jordan River *flowed downward* to the south, all the way to the Dead Sea—which is called the Dead Sea not only because nothing can live there, but because there's no tributaries that flow out of it. But as soon as the feet of those carrying the ark of the covenant touched the water, Scripture tells us that the waters began to be backed up in one heap a good distance north of them—at a city called *Adam*. Now, the ark of the covenant was God's visible, tangible presence among His people—it was a type of Christ. And when the ark of the covenant entered the waters—what happened? The river that flowed down from Adam, sweeping everything in its path to the sea of the dead was completely cut off, and God's people were able to cross unharmed into the promised land. And this is exactly what Christ has done for all those who belong to Him. It is only "through Jesus Christ our Lord" that grace now reigns. It was Him and Him alone who caused the waters of judgment, that had been flowing down from Adam to all his descendants, to be completely cut off. "It is His person and work that has secured our acceptance with God. . . That's how grace reigns. It reigns over sin. It reigns through the righteousness of Christ. It results in your receiving eternal life, and it is all by Jesus Christ, your Lord." (quote from Ligon Duncan, *Covenant Theology*).

¹⁰⁶ Richard Lovelace puts it this way: "We all automatically gravitate toward the assumption that we are justified by our level of sanctification, and when this posture is adopted it inevitably focuses our attention not on Christ but on the adequacy of our own obedience. We start each day with our personal security resting not on the accepting love of God and the sacrifice of Christ but on our present feelings or recent achievements in the Christian life. . ." (*The Dynamics of Spiritual Life*).

¹⁰⁷ This illustration was gratefully gleaned from Phil Smuland in his sermon on Romans 5:12-19 at Covenant Presbyterian (PCA), in Harrisonburg, VA: (<https://www.cov-pres.org/resources/teachings/P399>). I've profited immensely from his teaching.