

**Christ's Triumph Over Sin and Death**  
**Romans 5:12-21**

I'm going to attempt my first ever Star Wars illustration (though the idea didn't originate with me). I'm not the Star Wars enthusiast (I'm not the pastor who went to the theatre dressed like Chewbacca!), but I do appreciate many of the themes in it. Our text focuses on *the disobedience of Adam and the obedience of Christ*. Paul says elsewhere, the 1st Adam & the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45) - *a tale of 2 Adams*.

Bird points out that episodes 1-6 of Star Wars could be called "A Tale of Two Skywalkers."

- The 1st Skywalker (*Anakin* Skywalker) faced the temptation to give in to "the dark side" of the Force.
- And he did give into it. Death, destruction and chaos followed.
- In *contrast*, the 2nd Skywalker (*Luke* Skywalker) faced the same temptation.
- But Luke was faithful and obedient to the Jedi vocation.
- Consequently hope, life, and the triumph of good followed.
- In fact, Luke was able to redeem the first Skywalker, his evil father Anakin.

Filmmaker George Lucas said that the entire Star Wars trilogy – or at least he first trilogy – was concerned with the redemption of *Anakin* Skywalker. (Ibid)

*Similarly, you could say that the entire storyline of the Bible is about the redemption of the first "Adam" by the Second Adam, Christ Jesus.*

Whereas Star Wars is fiction, Romans 5 is teaching us about the true story of the whole world. This text begins with the first man, Adam, and it moves to the work of Christ, and includes the future reign of Christ – from Creation to New Creation.

Paul *changes lenses from in 5:12-21*.

- He was talking about the experience of our personal salvation; but now he switches to a wide-angle lens, and puts our salvation within the grand story of redemption.

This is a most relevant text because it speaks to every human being that has ever lived. Everyone is included.

And it's a wonderfully encouraging text... because it points us to Christ's *triumph*, and our *security* in Him.

Thomas Schreiner:

"Adam and Christ are the two most influential individuals in human history, and believers can take confidence because they belong to one who has overturned all that Adam introduced into the world."

Adam and Christ aren't merely two **historical figures**; they're two **representative figures**.

- Adam, our ultimate ancestor, is the head of a race of sinners;
- Christ, our Savior is the head of a new race of redeemed people.
  - In politics people often complain, "I'm not represented!"
  - Well, there are no complaints in Christ! We are with Him and He reigns!
  - You may not like being united to Adam, but you don't have to stay there!

In some ways, Romans 5 is an explanation of **1 Corinthians 15:22**

**22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.**

Paul goes on 1 Corinthians to draw out more contrasts in verses 45-49.

**The overarching application? We are either in Adam, or in Christ.**

- These are the only two options.
- Note the repetition the word "**one**" throughout Romans 5:12-19.
  - It is used **12 times**.
- Paul is emphasizing our **identification** with Adam and/or with Christ.

**In Christ, sons of Adam can be redeemed, restored, renewed, and will one day return to the Paradise that God destined them to dwell in for all eternity.**

Now there's a lot of emphasis on Adam's fall, sin and death, but don't miss the overriding concern of Paul here: it's to share **good news**.

**The major emphasis is not on Adam's failure, but on Christ's triumph over sin and death.**

### **#1: The Conflict (5:12-14)**

"**Therefore**" in **verse 12**.

- Paul is picking up with the previous discourse in 5:1-11.
- He was talking about **peace, grace**, and the **future glory of God** (1-5),
- Then he emphasized how God **reconciled** us to Himself through Christ (6-11).
- Vv 5:12-21 tell us about **the enemies that threaten these blessings: sin and death**.

Sin & death brought **the great conflict** – because of sin, we are alienated from God.

- **Peace** (5:1) was lost because of sin
- **Future glory** (5:3) is threatened because of sin and death.
- **Trials** (5:4) exist because of sin and death.
- **Reconciliation** (6-11) **needs to happen because we are at odds with God**.

The good news of Romans 5:12-21 is that

- Peace can be restored in Christ
- The glory that Adam lost will be restored even greater in Christ.
- In Christ, we are reconciled to God.

## 12a: Adam's fall introduced sin and death into the world.

- “sin came into the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin”
- The **Genesis narrative** makes this point plain.
  - Sin wasn't merely breaking a rule.... taking a bit of fruit
  - It was a *revolution*.
  - It was *idolatry* – it was a failure *to love God*.
  - It involved the “de-godding” of God (Carson)
  - The *effects were/are devastating*.
- Adam was to **rule the world for God and subdue creation**.
- But when he sinned, he suffered alienation from God, corruption, and death.
- He **passed on that same alienation, corruption, and death to his descendants**.

What kind of “**death**” is he talking about? **Death is *physical* and *spiritual***.

- a. Physical: verses **13, 14**
  - b. Spiritual: verses **18-19** (“condemnation”)
- **Paul doesn't dive into the theological questions about original sin (What about this, what about that); he emphasizes the **consequences** of it – **condemnation & death**.**
  - **Moo: “The universal consequences of Adam's sin are the *assumption* in Paul's argument; the power of Christ's act to cancel those consequences is the *goal*.”**

## 12b: It's universal extent (12c) – “because all sinned”

- **Death has spread to everyone** because everyone is a sinner.
- Paul **suspends** his point (Notice he has a “just as” but never gets to the “so also”) and doesn't pick it up again until verses 18ff. See the --
- If you drop down to v. 18, you see that everyone is included: “condemnation for all men.”
- **Apart from Christ, we are under condemnation.**
- Paul has already made this point (eg., Rom 1:18-19; 3:9, 23)
- **We enter a world alienated from God and so we commit sin and we die.**
- The effects of Adam's sin are **universal**.

## 13-14: Sin and Death even apart from the Law

Paul reinforces his point about the universality of death.

- **Many Jews believed that there could be no death or sin apart from the law (Moo).**
- If there was no law, did the people before the law not sin? **Of course not!**

**13a: Until the Mosaic Law was given, sin existed in the world...**

**13b: meaning even though it was not technically specified as a violation of a revealed commandment**

**14: The people between Adam and Moses (who did not have the law and did not disobey specifically revealed commandments like Adam did [he violated a clear commandment from God]) are held responsible for sin too.**

**14b: We know they are accountable because they lived under the reign of death.**

- **Death provides the evidence of this fact.**

- The law helped to later identify the specificity of sin, but sin and death still existed before the law.

### Application:

- Chesterton quipped that *original sin* is the only doctrine that is empirically verifiable!
- Just look at United Airlines.... Or just smell men's feet!
- You don't have to teach a child to say "mine!"
- Bird says that raising toddlers is like working for Caligula and Charlie Sheen combined!

**People can't get away from the doctrine of sin, even when they try to deny it.**

Listen to secular researcher Burton White (who has engaged in lot of empirical research for decades on children) in *The New First Three Years of Life. "The Completely Revised and Updated Edition of the Parenting Classic."*

From fifteen to sixteen months on, as his self-awareness becomes more substantial, **something in his nature we don't fully understand**, will lead him to deliberately try each of these forbidden activities, specifically to see what will be allowed and what won't. In other words, he will begin systematically to challenge the authority of the adult he lives with. Resistance to simple requests becomes very common at this time, and if there is more than one child around, this can be a low point in the parenting experience.

Lol! "something in his nature, which we don't fully understand...."

**Well, we do understand it because God has revealed it to us in the Scriptures.**

We **are children of Adam**. And that's why we experience such "low points!"

**The good news is that Christ has come to overcome the effects of sin...**

**14b:** Adam as "a **type** of the One to come" is the subject of the following section...

- **A type is a person, place, or event that foreshadows or symbolizes another. ...**  
Adam points forward to Christ.

### #2: The Contrasts (5:15-19)

Note the phrase "**much more**" in verses 15,17 and "**just as ... so also**" in 18-19.

**"Much more"**

- Paul **contrasts** the work of Christ and the work of Adam.
- But they are not equal in power. Christ is supreme!
- In Jesus Christ we have gained much more than we ever lost in Adam!

**"[just] as ... so [also]" in verses 18-19.**

- The emphasis is really on the "**so also**" clause – that is, **what Christ has done**.
- The "**just as**" is the **obvious** part.
- The "**so also**" is what he's proclaiming – **Christ has overcome!**

**What Adam has lost, Christ has restored.**

## 4 Contrasts

### C1: Trespass/Gift (15)

You see an emphasis on “**Grace**” or “the gift” in verses 15-17 – 7 times.  
In Christ, God deals with us **on the basis of grace!**

It's by grace that we have a new identity, a new future, a new peace, etc.

- Adam's impact on humanity was **negative** – “**many died**” (physically & spiritually).
  - “**Many**” is a Semitic equivalent for “**all**” – we have to allow context to determine how inclusive Paul is being.
  - He has already said that death has spread to “all men.” (12)
- Christ's impact was **positive** – **grace overflowed to many**
  - “**Many**” – Context won't allow this to mean that “all” are actually saved.
  - Offered to all – yes.
  - It must be “**received**” by people (v. 17)
  - **Verse 17** is important for seeing that this passage is not teaching **universalism**.
  - Salvation is offered to all; all need it, but you must receive it.

Note the gracious work of Christ.

- Adam brought alienation from God.
- **Jesus's grace and gift flourished for many.**
- Paul wants the reader to marvel at Christ's grace.
- “**much more**” “**grace of God,**” “**the gift,**” and **grace of the one man**” “**overflowed**”
- Jesus doesn't give grace begrudgingly!
- “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us...” (Ep 1:7-8)

The gift in view is probably the gift of righteousness (v. 16).

- Adam's transgression was **fatal**;
- Christ's gift was **life-giving, and life-changing**.
- Sin and death will not triumph over us because of the grace of Christ given to us.

Paul is painting a black picture of sin so that the good news of Christ will shine. It's like the jeweler does... engagement ring story ... black cloth makes the ring sparkle, “Oh, I'll take that one.” The contrasts continue...

### C2: Condemnation/Justification (16)

Here the focus is on **the results** that follow from the two men.

- Adam's work **resulted in condemnation**.
- The gracious work of Christ **resulted justification** (counted righteous).
- Everyone has one of these two statuses.
- Romans 4:4-5 – we receive it; we don't earn it.

**Application:** One of the repeated applications of Romans concerns our **identity**.

- In the gospel, we get a new identity.
- We are not in Adam; we are in Christ.
- **We have changed *locations* – from the swamp to the Palace – from quicksand to the Rock – from Dead Sea to Paradise – from a rat infested apartment to the Bill Gates Mansion.**
- What does this new identity mean? It changes everything.
- **We cannot make ourselves more justified than we already are.**
- Don't build your life on your performance, your popularity, your power, or by what your peers think of you.
- **Build your life on your personal identity in Christ -- you are justified before God, reconciled to God, and adopted by God.**
  - In the words of Romans 1:5, we are “loved by God.”
- If you are truly living out this identity, you will become a more humble, grateful, generous, compassionate, holy person.

### **C3: Death/Life (17)**

Continuing this same line of thought as v. 16...

What's the evidence for condemnation in Adam and justification in Christ?

- The evidence for universal condemnation is ***the reign of death*** over all people in Adam.
- The evidence for the gift of righteousness is ***the reign of life*** that we share in Christ.

Instead of Adam ruling over the world as God's agent, death ruled over Adam. By contrast, those in Christ, who are justified, shall reign in life.

This reigning in life has an already-not-yet focus.

We have life now, and we will reign with Christ forever.

**“those who receive the abundance of grace”**

God's grace doesn't come to us automatically.

- The experience of new life; this new status; this reign of life – only come to those who **receive** it ... who **believe** on the Messiah.

**Matt Foshee Story - little commercial break - a gospel advertisement**

- **Matt tells us about how God brought you from death to life – physically and spiritually? Now you are going to Utah to spread this good news, right? What's the need like? Let's be in prayer for this work... an offering coming up in a few weeks**
- **Platt, “He looked like death”**

Pastor Matt received an abundance of grace and was brought to life.

- **And so have all of us who are in Christ Jesus!**
- **You may not have been on your deathbed, addicted to drugs, but before we were in Christ, we were in Adam.**



- We needed spiritual life.
- Thanks be to God for bringing us to life – by his superabundant grace!

#### **C4: Disobedience/Obedience (18-19)**

**18:** Paul picks up his argument that he began in verse 12.

- So Adam’s “**one act**” and “**disobedience**” is contrasted with Christ’s “**one righteous act**” and “**obedience.**”

The **obedience** of Christ and this “**one righteous act**” is probably referring to the **ultimate act of obedience, death on a cross (Phil 2:8)**, which of course has eternal significance because of his whole life of obedience.

#### **The Outcomes**

- Adam’s fall led to “**condemnation for all men**”
- Jesus’ work led to “**justification and life for all men.**”
  - **Justification** – a **forensic** act. Being declared righteous.
  - Paul joins it with “**life.**”
  - This forensic act gives us spiritual life.
- This is available “**for all men.**”

**V. 19:** Paul essentially restates verse 18 in this verse with an emphasis on **the future** and **the transformative effect** of Christ’s work.

- In Adam, we are “**made us sinners**” and in Christ (by faith) we “**will be made righteous.**”
- The two men represent us and appoint a certain status to us.

“many were made” and “many **will be made** righteous” – could be about being declared righteous upon belief, but I take the future tense to be real future – we will be transformed on the final day.

**Christ’s righteous act in the middle of history leads to our present justification, a future justification, and a future transformation.**

So we have the whole biblical storyline here.

#### **Application**

- Christianity gives the best explanation for the suffering and misery in the world – it’s a result of living in a sinful, fallen world.
- But it also gives the only solution to the problem: in the second Adam, Christ.
- Jesus is the hope of the whole world.

Paul describes the superiority of Christ to Adam in 1 Corinthians 15, reminding us of the hope we have in being united to Jesus:

<sup>45</sup> Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

<sup>46</sup> But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

**If you are in Christ, you have this hope – you are united to “the man of heaven.”**

- **Believers, who bear the image of Adam, will one day be transformed into the image of Christ.**
- **We will behold Him, and we will be like him.**
- **We will share in a resurrected, glorified body.**
- **So this life is as bad as it will ever be!**
- **Soon, suffering will be no more.**
- **We will be with Him, and we will reign with Him.**

### **#3: The Conclusion: Christ Has Overcome! (20-21)**

**V. 20:** Paul concludes with the place of the Mosaic Law in this grand view of history.

A Jew may ask, how can you jump from Adam to Jesus – what about all the good stuff God did for Israel in between that time?

Paul does believe in the rest of the OT!

And he has already affirmed that Israel had wonderful privileges.

However, he is thoroughly convinced that the law does not solve the problem of sin.

**The law can count sin, but it can't counter it (Bird).**

**It not only serves to “increase the trespass”**

- The law didn't bring relief from the sin problem; it **made it worse!**
- I don't think Paul is thinking about how the law could **actually stimulate more rebellion in people.**
- Rather, he's thinking along the lines of Romans 4:15 – that is, **that the law makes people accountable to a specific detailed series of commandments, thus bringing greater judgment.** (Moo)
- Notice it's not “trespasses” but **“the trespass”** – that is, **the gravity of sin is weightier with specific laws.**

**The solution to sin is not the Mosaic Law, but the Messiah....**

**The solution is grace, the gift of righteousness and life – through Jesus.**

- **“God's grace abounded all the more!”**
- **The only hope for humanity is grace, not the law...**

**V 21:** In Adam, sin has sway over us.

- **It rules us.**
- **We are under the dominion of death.**



**In Christ, grace reigns over us.**

- **We who have been declared righteous have life.**

**Summary: There is more grace in Christ than sin in us!**

- **Christ towers over Adam!**
  - **His grace towers over Adams sin, like UNC playing against a group of seminary students!**
  - **His Grace not equal to sin; it's greater!**
  - **John Bunyan: *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners***
  - **Paul knew that. That's why he could talk trash to death! "What's up death? What you got? In Christ, we will have the victory - because of who He is."**
  - **Death will not rule over the Christian, because we are united to the Living Lord of glory.**
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- **We will share in the life of the world to come.**
  - **We will share in the new creation.**
  - **We will share in a cosmic renewal, the consummation of God's purposes.**
  - **Grace has indeed abounded to us!**

Who makes a this possible? Notice the book ends: – **Rom 5:1** – “**through our Lord Jesus Christ**” and **5:21**. Christ. Grace has come to us in a person. Through him we have access to this grace in which we stand.

**Through Christ, we can have victory over sin and death.**

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,  
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt,  
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,  
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;  
Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that is greater than all our sin.

—Julia H. Johnston