

**Romans:  
The Covenant of Grace Stands in Bold Contrast  
to the Broken Covenant of Works**

**Romans 5:15-17**

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans 5, and look at verse 15. As we do so let me remind you where we have been. We said last week in Romans 5:12, Paul is beginning a new section of the book of Romans. He is recapitulating for us. He is actually providing us the underlying principles, those things which under gird the argument that He has made from Romans, chapter 1, verse 18, all the way to Romans, chapter 5, verse 11. He's trying to show you the things which under gird this glorious gospel of grace which he's been explaining to you during that time. And he is showing us a bigger picture. He's answering the question why it is so necessary to be saved by grace, not through works, to be saved by faith alone in Christ alone, by God's grace alone.

And we said that as he began this new argument in Romans, chapter 5, verse 12, that he immediately interrupted himself. You can tell how excited Paul is in Romans 5, verses 12 to the end of the chapter, because he interrupts himself repeatedly. In Romans 5:12, he had begun with the assertion that all men through Adam's sin were guilty, and that death had spread throughout the world because of Adam's sin. And before he can get his very next phrase out, he pauses and thinks now I know there's somebody who's going to disagree with that. There's going to be somebody out there that doesn't like that. They take issue with it, and so he pauses and in verses 13 and 14 he explains it. He demonstrates it scripturally. He goes back to the period of time prior to Moses and prior to the law, and shows that the principle that he sets forth in Romans 5, verse 12, is indeed true.

And then he gets to the end of verse 14, and he says something very interesting. He parallels Adam and Christ. He parallels the Old Covenant or the covenant of works with the covenant of grace, and he speaks of Adam as a type of Christ. Notice his words, Adam who is a type of Him who was to come. It's almost an after thought. He throws it out there, and he's ready to say his next word, and he realizes, 'O that's going to confuse some people.' So he stops and in verses 15, 16 and 17, he wants to explain some ways in which Christ is different from Adam. He's just asserted that there are certain parallels between Adam and Christ.

Indeed, he has asserted that Adam himself was a foreshadowing in some ways of Jesus Christ. But the minute that He says that, he says, you know, I've got to qualify that. I've got to show you three ways in which Adam is not like Christ, and in which Christ is much greater than Adam and in which the covenant of works stands in, or the covenant of grace stands in bold contrast with the covenant of works.

Now you remember the reason that Paul has been doing this all along is to show us why salvation by works just won't work. Especially that was the focus of what he said in verses 12 through 14. Now in verses 15 through 17, indeed we can say in the whole of this section, he is concerned that our assurance of salvation would be grounded in what God has done in His covenant of grace, and not in our own righteousness. If it's found in our righteousness, we'll never be assured; and if it's truly grounded in our righteousness, our acceptance with God will be secure. And so Paul is concerned that we see the big picture, that we see this web of sin that we're involved in, but that we also see the greatness of God's grace in Jesus Christ. So let's study this passage together. Let's hear God's holy word beginning in verse 15:

But, the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one, the many die. Much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. And the 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. 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.

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired and inerrant Word. May He add His blessing to it.

Our Father, we thank You for this word. We pray that you would teach us by Your Holy Spirit what You mean, for as deep and as profound as are Paul's words. He wrote them us not to impress us with his grasp of your ultimate truth, but to comfort us with that truth, and especially with the reality of Your grace, as such he meant to be understood. By Your spirit, help us to understand and to respond accordingly. In Jesus name, Amen.

What's so amazing about grace? A recent author has asked that question in his book title. Another recent Christian author has suggested that we need to put amazing back into grace. Both of them are, I think, are echoing the same sentiments. It seems that the Christian church in our time doesn't think that grace is that amazing. Grace is rather blasé. Grace is almost expected by many Christians today. It's our right. God has to show grace. There is nothing

surprising about grace. Well, of course, God forgives. Of course, God shows mercy. Of course, God grants grace. That's His job, after all. That seems to be the attitude. The apostle Paul in this passage is undercutting that attitude, not to be a spoiler, not to be an ogre to rain on our parade, but precisely in order that we might know the blessing of true grace. Because, as the apostle Paul will tell us in this passage, it's utterly amazing, it's utterly surprising, it's utterly unexpected, and it's greater than anything you've ever imagined. And he's calling those who are doubters to realize that. And he's calling on those who don't know the grace of Christ to taste of it, because there's nothing in the world like it.

And in this passage he underscores the glory of grace. The glory of what Christ has done in three ways. He makes three distinctions between what Adam did and what Christ has done in order to underscore for us the glory of grace, to drive us away from dependence upon our own works, and to woo us to trust in Christ alone. And I'd like to tell you those three distinctions, just to help out lying in our own minds a passage which can be difficult. After all, the run on sentence here can leave your mind spinning. And let me outline those three distinctions, and then we'll come back to them, and see how Paul deploys them in his argument.

In verse 15, you'll see the first distinction, the first discontinuity between Adam and Christ. The first distinction is between God's justice in condemnation, and God's grace in redemption. And that way the covenant of works and the covenant of grace are totally different.

The second distinction, or just continuity, you'll find in verse 16. There Paul emphasizes that through one man's sin came death for all. Whereas, on the other hand, in the covenant of grace, many sins were covered by the righteousness of one man.

And then thirdly in verse 17, the third contrast or distinction or discontinuity between Adam and Christ is this. One man's sin led to the reign of death, Paul emphasizes. On the other hand, one man's death led to his people's reign in life. Those are the three distinctions, the three differences that Paul wants to highlight between the work of Adam and the work of Christ.

Why does he want to underscore this? So you'll understand how amazing grace is. And so that you'll understand that what he is saying to you is not this: what was lost in Adam, was regained in Christ. You see, that's almost a parallel, isn't it? What was lost to Adam, is regained in Christ. As far as Paul is concerned, the story of redemption, the story of redemption, the story of salvation, the story of God's grace is better than that. And it is that what God has done in His covenant of grace is beyond all that we could ask or imagine, and it so far outstrips what was lost in the covenant of works as it was broken in Adam that it will blow your mind to think about it. And he walks you through that argument in three parts. I'd like to look with you briefly this morning at each of these parts of his argument.

## **I. The free gift is not like the transgression.**

First, in verse 15, the free gift is not like the transgression, he says. For if by the transgression of one, the many die, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ abound to the many. In other words, what Paul is saying is that universal judgment is not surprising. God's universal condemnation is not surprising. God's universal judgment is in fact warranted by the fact. There is absolutely nothing surprising about the bad news. There is nothing surprising about the condemnation to hell of men and women who have rebelled against God. There's nothing surprising about that, Paul says. It's deserved. It's warranted. But salvation, even the salvation of one single, solitary soul is gratuitous, it's undeserved, it's unearned, it's surprising, it's amazing.

Now friends, very frankly, that's totally opposite from the way we think in our day and age. We think of salvation as an entitlement. We think that one person, separated from God and held for eternity, calls into question God's justice and His goodness. The apostle Paul begs to differ. Paul sees the other way around. Paul says that because of Adam's transgression, all deservedly die. But because of what Christ did, everyone in Him becomes the undeserving recipients of God's grace.

Paul is deploying a much more extensive argument here. He is not just saying that what was lost through Adam was regained in Christ. No, he is saying more than that. He is saying that the gift of grace in Christ is incomparably greater than the condemnation which resulted from Adam's sin. He gives us an escalating contrast. If all received the just sentence of death because of Adam, he argues, how much more is it true that all have received the super abundance in God's grace in Jesus Christ. Whereas, one sin led to the consequence of universal death, and that death was justified, so also the righteousness of Christ led to grace super abounding, but grace which was undeserved, unearned, unwarranted by anything in us. And the apostle Paul wants you to see that this continuity from the judgment that has been visited on us because of Adam's sin, and the grace that has been shown us by Jesus Christ. As far as the apostle Paul is concerned, it makes perfect sense that people go to hell.

Perhaps you have run into someone who thinks it's unfair that God would send anyone to hell: "Well, I call into question any God that would send someone to hell." And the apostle Paul comes back to them, and he basically says, "Look, if you're going to complain about something being unfair, you're going to have to complain about heaven and grace." That's unfair. That's unwarranted. The pardon that God gives to us to open up the gates of glory, that's unfair.

We've been thinking a lot about pardons recently, haven't we? On the last day of our former President's presidency, he managed to stir up another controversy.

And the Mark Rich pardon has obtained a great deal of discussion and scrutiny and criticism. And there are a lot of reasons for that. There's the question is there a *quid pro quo* here, and furthermore there is the question that this man is a fugitive of justice. He was under indictment, with a great weight of evidence for the embezzlement of millions of dollars which belong to individuals and the United States government. He was engaged in activity that was immoral at best with the enemy, according to the indictment. He fled authorities as he was almost in their grasp, he went to another country, and there are a lot of question. What is the warrant for this pardon? What justifies pardoning a man like this?

And I want you to understand that what Paul is saying is that Mark Rich's pardon is child's play compared to the pardon that God gave to you. Paul is saying, there is absolutely no warrant in you whatsoever for God to pardon you. And that's what He did in Jesus Christ. There's nothing in your that commends yourself to a received pardon from the almighty God. And yet God has pardoned us. So if you're going to complain about something being unfair, then it's heaven and grace that you're going to have to complain about. You're going to have to complain that God let somebody in. If you're looking for human warrant, that's the only place that you'll be able to complain against God. That's how great God's salvation is. That's how great God's grace is.

## **II. One man's sin leads to death for all.**

But Paul's not finished yet. Look at verse 16. Here he argues again. The free gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. In the first discontinuity, Paul contrasts God's justice and God's grace. God's justice is deserved when we are condemned. God's grace is not deserved when we are pardoned. We haven't contributed anything to the deserving of that grace. Here however, he focuses on the implications of Adam's sin, one man's sin leads to death for all, whereas in God's covenant of grace, many sins are covered by one man's righteousness. In other words, Paul says that Adam's sin had race-wide implications. Everybody in the human race was involved, was implicated, was corrupted and deserved justice because of Adam's sin, whereas, in contrast many, many, many iniquities, and by the way that's an understatement, not a hyperbole, were covered by Jesus Christ. Because of Adam's transgression, because of one sin, all were judged and condemned Paul argues in verse 16. But in spite of millions of sins in the covenant of grace, Christ the one man, his righteousness caused all who were in him to be acquitted. So Paul's second contrast focuses on the consequences of Adam's actions in distinction from the consequences of Christ's free gift. Adam's transgression, his deliberate transgression of God's law, his rebellion against God's will led to a just judgment in condemnation. But in contrast to this, on the contrary, the sins of all who believe in Christ are forgiven and their persons are justified and acquitted and pardoned by free gift and grant.

And think of this for a minute, it makes perfect sense to us to see how one

iniquity can spread and ruin. Husbands, I know this has happened to you before. You walk in the house. One sinful cross word to your wife, and suddenly you are looking at three weeks of tension, because one thing leads to another, which leads to another, which leads to another thing, which leads to another thing, and it all just breaks apart. We are familiar with how one sin disrupts a relationship. Paul says, there's nothing surprising about that. There's nothing surprising about judgment and condemnation flowing from the sin of Adam. But what is totally surprising is this picture of millions and millions and millions of sins. And suddenly, because of the superabundance of God's grace, the pattern of sin is disrupted, and the pattern of condemnation is broken, and these people are acquitted and justified.

Perhaps you have friends whose lives are in shambles because of sin. Maybe it's because they have sinned themselves. Maybe it's because they have been sinned against someone else. And the apostle Paul says, you know it's the most surprising thing in the world when I look out, and I see God's grace reverse the effects of sin. You think of it. Adam is the only person in the history of the world who was an appropriate scapegoat in his life. Would you have liked to have been Adam living another 900 years after the fall. Hmmm, it would be pretty nice to live 900 years. But think about this: everywhere you go, somebody can point to you and say, "You know, this is all his fault. It's all his fault. He messed up. He got us in this mess." And Paul says, "You know, that's true, but think of the contrast. A hundred and fifty generations of generational sin and corruption reversed by the grace of God in Jesus Christ." You see it's not just that Jesus Christ has put the lid back on Pandora's Box. It's better than that. He's liquidated our debt. He's absorbed our penalty. He's acquitted us in court, and He's transformed our hearts by grace. He has put a stop to the incessant seemingly immutable pattern of sin and judgment and condemnation. And Paul says that's surprising. You want to find something to be surprised about, don't be surprised about sin in a fallen world. There's nothing surprising about that. What's surprising is about the transforming grace of God.

### **III. Christ's righteousness leads to life for believers**

Thirdly, he goes on to argue in verse 17. There's another difference between what Christ has done in the covenant of grace, and what was done by Adam in the broken covenant of works. One man's sin led to the reign of death. That's what happened to Adam. But in bold contrast, one man's death led to His people's reign in life. Adam's transgression led to the reign to death overall. But Christ's righteousness led to believer's reign in life. The reign of death in this world, can be traced to Adam. Paul is telling us that believers here and now, as well as then and there, reign in life in Christ. Paul's third contrast compares the reign of death through Adam's sin, with the reign of life with those who trust in Christ.

Now let me pause right here and draw your attention to two terms that are very important for you to understand. Throughout this passage you will see Paul use the terms "all" and "many." Does he mean something different by those terms. The answer is no. The words *all* and *many* in this passage are interchangeable as far as the apostle Paul is concerned. They are stressing two aspects of the same truth.

Let me prove my point. Look at verse 15. There it says by the transgression of the one, the many died. Now, does Paul mean that by Adam's sin some people died, but not all people? Is that why he uses many there. No. Go back and look at verse 12. Through one man, sin entered into the world and death spread to all men. All in verse 12, and many in verse 15 are parallel. Paul will use many in this passage to stress the amazing multiplying effect of sin; even though it was one sin, many are impacted. He's not saying many, but not all. He is saying, "Isn't it amazing that one sin can wreak this kind of destruction?" But the parallel between many and all is exact. Now, why do I raise that point? Because there are many well-meaning people who come to this passage and say, "Well, you know it says that all die because of that one sin, and it says that the many died by that one sin, and it says that all were justified by Christ, and the many were justified by Christ. So I guess what this passage is teaching is that everybody is saved." In other words, many people come to this passage and say, "Aha, Paul is teaching is teaching the doctrine of universalism here. Everybody is justly condemned, but everybody is also justified and saved through the work of Jesus Christ. And, therefore, they say to us it's our job as Christians not to go out and say repent and be saved. It is our job as Christians to go out and say, 'Look, you're already saved.' God's already saved everyone. The gospel is to announce to everyone that they're already saved." I want to tell you, my friends, that is a lie from the pit of hell, and people who tell you that are wolves in sheep's clothing. Universalism is absolutely false biblically and even this passage shows it. Let's look.

Verse 17 lets you know that Paul is not saying 'all are saved.' Paul is not establishing universalism 2000 years ahead of time. Paul is not telling us go out and tell everybody they are already saved. Look at verse 17. "For if by the transgression of the one, death reigns 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." You see, the apostle Paul does not say the sin of Adam resulted in the reign of death overall and the righteousness of Christ resulted in the reign of life over all. That's not what he said at all, is it? The parallel is this. The sin of Adam led to the reign of death overall. The righteousness of Christ led to all those who receive Him reigning in life by His grace. That's the parallel. Those who receive Him are the ones who participate in this great gift. Those who receive Him by faith alone as He has offered in the gospel. Now of course, that's not Paul's prime point in this passage, but it is a truth which is invariably and unavoidably, appropriately and rightly deduced from this passage.

Paul's point, however, in this passage is to show you that whereas sin and judgment and death are inevitable, the super abundance of God's grace is the most surprising thing in the world. We see the grace of God abounding when we see sinners reigning in this life, by faith in Jesus Christ, because of the grace of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Think of the woman at the well. Here's a woman with five former husbands who's living with a man. And her timing is so perfect that she ends up standing next to the only sinless human being that ever lived. And she is out at the well at a time of day when nobody would have been drawing water. And why is she there? Because she knows that if she were there with the other women, they wouldn't have talked to her. They would have talked about her. And suddenly she is standing there before the King of Kings, the water of life. And suddenly her life is changed. And His grace takes over. And suddenly she is back in her little hometown and everybody is going, "What has happened to her? She has changed. What has happened?" I'll tell you what's happened. The reign of grace. It's not like the sin of Adam. It's unbelievable. It reverses generational patterns of sin. It gives newness of life. Think of Paul, he was a Christian hunter. He loved to see Christians captive imprisoned and killed. He held the cloaks while Stephen was stoned to death. And suddenly there he is, he's on the road to Damascus, and his life is changed. He's made to be an emissary for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace changes things. It's not like the sin of Adam. That makes perfect sense, the pernicious influence and corruption of sin, but grace, it's the most surprising thing in the world. It's also the most unexpected thing in the world. Maybe you're here today, and you've been blasé about grace, and you've forgotten about that initial excitement about the freshness of God's mercy to you in Jesus Christ. Maybe you need to be reminded just how amazing God's grace is. And Paul is waiting for you. And he's saying to you, "Christian, you need to sing the doxology for God's grace." Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, there's nothing like Your grace, and we take it for granted. We underestimate our sin. We overestimate what we deserve. We are arrogant before You. We stand before You in our own pride, and we think that we can earn Your love. And we forget the words of Isaiah that You dwell in unapproachable light, You are high and lifted up, and yet at the same time You dwell with those who are humble, those who are lowly in heart. As we are humbled by Your word in this very passage, so exalt *Yourself and exalt all those who humble themselves before You, trusting by faith in Jesus Christ and resting in His righteousness alone for salvation. We'll give you all the praise and all the glory. In Jesus name, Amen.*

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