

**Romans:
The Parallels Between the Broken Covenant of Works
and the Covenant of Grace**

Romans 5:18-19

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 5. We're going to be looking at verses 18 and 19, but let me ask you to allow your eyes to roam back to verse 12, because you will remember that in verse 12 Paul began a sentence which he did not complete. There is a "just as" for which there is no "so also" in verse 12. In fact the apostle interrupted himself mid-sentence to tell you two very important things. One thing he wanted to tell you in verses 13 and 14, another thing he wanted to tell you in verses 15 through 17. Having accomplished his purpose in telling you those two things before he completed his sentence, in verse 18 he now goes back to his original sentence in verse 12, phrases it slightly different and completes it. That's where we are today. Let's hear God's holy word. Romans, chapter 5, 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. For 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."

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

Our Lord, the sentences of this word are dense with truth, but clear as day. By Your spirit help us to understand and to respond to them in faith, belief, obedience and gratitude. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The apostle Paul we have said from Romans, chapter 1, verse 16 all the way to Romans, chapter 5, verse 11 has been laying the groundwork for explaining why it was that salvation was by grace alone, or more particularly, why we are saved by grace through faith alone in Christ alone; why we are justified by God's grace through the alone instrument of our believing on Jesus Christ as He is offered in the gospel. And when he gets to Romans, chapter 5, verse 12 he begins a new section of the book. In that section, which will run all the way to the end of chapter 8, he 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 not merely repeating himself, he's not merely recapitulating what he's already said, he's actually pulling back and saying, "Let me explain to you 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 Adam and Christ, 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 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 than the work that Adam did to bring us into this situation, and the situation which we actually find ourselves in. 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 he did in verses 15 through 17.

Having done that, however, he now goes back to discuss the continuities or parallels between Adam and Christ. To put it another way, the parallels between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace here in verses 18 and 19.

Now you will appreciate this passage more if you will remember once more the audience context in which Paul is speaking this. Remember who the people are that are Paul's opponents. Paul has Jewish opponents and professing Christians who he will call the Judaizers. Those who will say that at some level our individual righteousness must commend us to God in salvation, either through the ceremonial law, or through our keeping of the moral law. Some of them said, 'Well Christ saves you, but it's Christ plus circumcision.' And others said, 'Well yes, Christ saves you, but it's Christ keeping the ceremonial law of Moses.' And others were saying, 'Yes, but it's Christ plus keeping the Ten Commandments. You have to add some of your own obedience, some of your own moral rectitude in order to commend yourself to God.' In other words, a theology of *plus* pervaded the thinking of Paul's opponents. They thought *Christ plus this*, equals salvation. And what Paul wants to press upon them is that it is Christ alone who brings our salvation, and it is faith alone in what He has done alone that brings to us our right standing before God.

And so Paul, when he goes to this analogy between Adam and Christ; when he

explains to us the covenant of works and the covenant of grace here in Romans, chapter 5, verse 12-19, is doing it in order to set at naught misconceptions of the right way of salvation.

Now having said that as introduction, I simply want to walk you through three things in this passage today. There's a lot of truth in this passage, and we can't cover it all. But we can cover some of it. I'd like to do it using these three categories. Your predicament, your culpability, and your only hope. Hang your hat on those three things as an outline for what we're going to look at today. And then permit me to make one or two or three digressions along the way, and I think we'll have some sort of a grasp of this passage.

I. If you are counting on your own works for salvation, you are in a hopeless position. - *Your predicament.*

First of all, let's start in verse 18, the first half of the verse, and let's look at your predicament. The apostle Paul makes it clear in verse 18 again that if you are trusting in your works in any way for your salvation, you are in a hopeless position. Paul in verse 18 begins to restate the case that he had made in verse 12. Everything in between, from verses 13 through 17, consist of the two qualifications he wanted to make about what he was about to say. But see this parallel, it's very clear. Look up at verse 12, you will see a "just as" in verse 12, but you'll never see a "so also." You'll see protasis, but no apodosis for any of you grammarians out there. You'll see a "just as" and a clause associated with it, but you'll not see a "so also," a responding, an ending clause, a concluding clause of the article. But if you look down in verse 18, you'll see that in the first half of the verse, Paul virtually restates what he had said in verse 12. So then, as through one transgression, there resulted condemnation to all men. The "so then" could also be translated "consequently," "therefore," or "just as." 'So then' is the perfectly good word for it.

But notice the perfect parallel. As through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all. Now look back at verse 12, just as through one man's sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death spread to all men. Notice the parallel. What you have in verse 18 that you didn't have in verse 10 is the "so also." Read ahead in verse 12: Even so, through the act of righteousness, through one act of righteousness, there is also justification of life to all men. So Paul is resuming his argument here in verse 18.

But in the beginning of this verse, and that's what I want you to concentrate on for a moment, Paul is asserting again that Adam's one original sin resulted in the condemnation of all men. In other words, he is asserting that Adam was our representative. He was our federal head. And that his original sin had consequences for us.

Now again, before you argue with that, let's get one thing clear first. Here's what Paul is saying. Separate two questions. Some of you are saying, "That's not fair." I know that. And I promise that I will give you an answer for that today, God willing. But before you get to the 'that's not fair,' let's first think about what Paul is saying, because before you get to verse 18, six times Paul says the same thing. Walk me through the passage beginning at verse 12.

Six times Paul reiterates that Adam's sin impacts not only you, some of you, but all of you, all of us. All of us are involved in the guilty and condemnation of Adam's sin. Look at verse 12: "Through one man, sin entered into the world." Look at it again. You're saying, "That's not fair." Well, hold on. Through one man, sin entered into the world. Look again, verse 12: "Through one man death through sin entered the world." Look again, verse 12: Through one man death spread to all men because one man sinned through Adam is the implication there. Look at verse 15, "By the transgression of the one, the many died." Look again, verse 16: "The judgment arose, (that is the judgment of all of us) from the one transgression resulting in condemnation of us all. And again in verse 17: "If by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one." You see in all of these clauses, Paul is stressing that one man's sin, Adam's, impacted everybody. He stressing not just the doctrine of original sin that Adam had rebelled, but he's stressing the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's original sin to everybody in the human race. That is, in some way we bear a responsibility for that sin.

And look at the progression of Paul's thought. Adam's sin resulted in what? Sin in the world, death in the world, judgment in the world, condemnation in the world, the reign of death in the world, and ultimately the condemnation of us all. So Paul here is focusing us on the one act of Adam as the problem for us all.

Now the reason he is doing that you will see, I hope later one, when we parallel what he says about justification. Because just as he says one act got us into this mess, one act, and one act only, can get us out of this mess. Now, that's very important because Paul is speaking to people who think that in order to be right with God they've to do certain things. They've got to do this ritual, they've to obey this command. They've got to commend themselves to God. And what's Paul trying to do? He's trying to draw their attention away from their singular acts, from their individual acts, from their individual righteousness, to think about one act, one obedience, one righteousness done by Jesus Christ. So this is one reason why Paul is doing this Adam-Christ parallel. In other words, the one place to look for salvation is not our own works, or the works of other men even saintly men. But to the one man, the right man, Jesus Christ.

Now let me also say in passing, seemingly problematically, Paul does an interesting parallel in this passage. That is a parallel of two *alls*. Look at verse 18, the whole verse. He says, "Through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men." Now once again, we're back to that

universalism thing. Is Paul teaching that everybody is saved? Our job is just to announce it. Everybody is saved. Why bother? Close up the church doors at home. We're all saved. Why bother? It looks like condemnation to all men, justification of life to all men.

Well, three reasons why Paul is not teaching that salvation has a universal scope or that the work of Christ results in the actual salvation of all men. First and foremost, Paul throughout the book of Romans has made it clear that salvation is for believers, and believers only. Think of Romans 1: 16 and 17 where he makes this point. Salvation is for those who believe. To the Jew first and also to the Greek, "To them that receive the gospel." As they believe in it. Think again of Romans, chapter 3, verses 21 through 26. Who is it who receives the benefits of Jesus' atoning work? Those who believe on Him. Those who exercise faith in Him.

Secondly, in this very passage we saw last week in verse 17, that Paul stresses that Christ's salvation is not for every last person that ever lived. It is for whom? For those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness. This salvation must be received by faith. In this very passage, in other words, Paul makes it clear that the salvation of Jesus Christ does not extend to every last person, but to those who receive that salvation by faith.

And finally, if we were to look at I Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 22 and 23, we would find a verse that is very similar to Romans 5:18. That verse says, "As in Adam, all die; so in Christ all shall be made alive." So there again is that all parallel. But if you look at verse 23, you will see that Paul parallels all with something. What is that something? In I Corinthians 15:23 that something is those who are Christ's. So the all of salvation parallels with what? With those *who are Christ's*, those who belong to Christ, those who belong to Him by faith, those who have trusted in Him. So Paul is not teaching in this passage that all are condemned, and all are saved, speaking of every last person that ever lived.

Well then, you say, why then is he saying the word *all*? Isn't that a little confusing? Well, that's a very good question, and I think I've got an answer for you. And it has to do with the very point that Paul is making. Paul is talking to Jewish folk who think that in order to be saved, you've got to become like them. And Paul is saying, "No, no, no. Salvation is for all, Jew and Greek; slave and free, male and female." The Jewishness of this thing means nothing. And so Paul's stress on all men is beautiful because he's saying all of us are condemned, and all of us have only one hope, and that is Jesus Christ and saving faith in Him. The reality of the broken covenant of works and the consequences that lie behind it, remind us of our inability to save ourselves. Paul in this passage is telling us about our predicament. All of us are involved in the sin of Adam. All of us are accountable to God for it. All of us are guilty for it, Paul says.

II. If you are counting on your own works for salvation, you are in a hopeless position - *Your culpability.*

Now there's a second thing I'd like to see here. Now Paul not only speaks about our predicament, he speaks about our culpability. We are justly condemned because we are responsible in our sin to God. So we are not only in a predicament, we are personally culpable. You see, a lot of people hear that Adam brought sin into the world, or Adam's sin brought sin into the world, and they think, "Well, that's not fair. Poor, innocent me. Poor innocent me, being caught up in this wicked thing that Adam has done." But Paul here says, "No, under the covenant of works, there is not only universal condemnation because we're in union with Adam, in the covenant of works there is universal sinnerhood by virtue of our union with Adam.

Paul in this passage, stresses two more things. Look at the first part of 19. First, I'd like you to see that he stresses the nature of Adam's sin. Have you noticed in this passage Paul uses three words to describe Adam's sin: *Transgression, trespass, and disobedience*. Now why is Paul using three different terms to describe Adam's sin? Basically because Paul wants to sum up for you that Adam broke God's law in about every way you could break it when he sinned against Him. It was *transgression*, that is, he crossed the line that God told him not to cross. He broke his command. God gave him an express command, and Adam broke that command. It was *trespass* in that Adam not only broke God's commandment, but he did positively what God has explicitly and specifically, negatively told him not to do. It's just like the little boys, who want to go hunting on somebody else's property. They don't have permission. The sign up there says "No Trespassing." They go right past the sign on the ground, they did exactly what the sign and the law told them not to do. So it's not just breaking the law, it's breaking of an explicit prohibition. Don't do it, but he does it. Thirdly, it's *disobedience*. In other words, Paul is saying it was willful. Adam didn't stumble into this. He wasn't tricked into this. Eve did not seduce him into this sin. Adam did, as Paul tells us as in II Timothy 2, Adam did exactly what he wanted to do. He knew exactly what he was doing.

So the apostle Paul is saying that Adam involved himself in sin in just about every way you can involve yourself in sin all at once. And as a result, that kind of sin nature pervades our race. Paul has already described it in you, especially at the end of chapter 1, chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3. Really, from 1:18 all the way to 3:20 Paul has been showing you that you were a sinner. He's saying to you here, "Now don't forget, you are a sinner." Don't say, 'Oh Paul, you're saying the opposite of what the prophet is saying.'" You remember Isaiah and the late prophets often said to Israel, don't say, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." In other words don't say, "Heavenly Father, our spiritual forefathers were wicked and evil and they did bad things, and we're paying the consequences for it. Poor innocent us." The

prophets told the people of Israel, don't do that because God was going to judge them for their own sins. And you can see somebody saying to Paul, "Well Paul, you're saying the same thing. You're saying, 'Here we are Adam did something and we're responsible for it.'" And Paul says, "Uh, uh, uh, you're a sinner." In every aspect of it you're a sinner." But He's not done.

There's a second thing. You not only see the nature of Adam's sin here, but you see the fact of our sinnerhood. Notice the words. Look at verse 18 and then look at the parallel in verse 19: "As through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men." Now when he says that all men are condemned, all he's doing is summing up what he said so far. In verse 19, he says something a little more: "For as through one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners." Paul says, 'Through Adam's sin, you not only became representative sinful, you became actually sinful. God's condemnation is just.'

Now you're still asking yourself, I still don't understand this whole imputation thing. I don't understand how it is that Adam does something and it's imputed to me. I don't understand how he can be my representative. And that sin can be imputed – I don't understand this whole representative principle. It's not fair. Let me give you an answer to that. I'd like to divide my answer in two parts.

First, I'd like to speak to believers. Believers that are just scratching their heads and wondering, "I just can't make sense of this. Help me." Then, I'd like to address unbelievers because in a congregation of this size there have got to be a skeptics who are saying. "You know, you Christians, will fall for anything. I've got a couple of things I'd like to say to you."

So, let's start off with the believers. Believers, I've got five answers I'd like to give you to that question. How is it that it is fair? What are the reasons that we have for believing that the imputation of Adam's sin is fair, that it is fair for Adam to be our federal representative. What are the reasons that we have for accepting and assuming it to be fair even if we don't understand it all? Five of them.

First, think of it friends, God was gracious in the way that He arranged the covenant of works in give Adam to us as our federal representative. Have you ever seen these half-time contests in college and professional football or basketball or baseball games where in-between innings or halves or quarters, they will bring out some person who won a drawing, and they'll either throw a football or they'll shoot a basket or they'll hit a long put, or they'll do something extraordinary and win a million dollars. You know, a guy has to stand at the fifty-yard line and throw ten straight passes through this shape, this thing fifty yards down the field. Okay, well in giving Adam as our representative, it would be like you're in a million-dollar contest at half time of the national championship game in April. And God says, "Look, you're not going to have to take this shot in order to win salvation. I'm going to bring out Michael Jordan for you. I'm going to let Michael Jordan take that forty-five foot jump shot for you. Or, you've got to sink a

put from the fairway. I'm going to bring out Tiger Woods to take that shot for you. I'm going to let him hack away at that ball on your behalf. When God gives you Adam, as your representative, he is giving someone of extraordinary capacities that you could hardly even grasp. He is an optimal representative. Aristotle is but the rubbish of fallen Adam, who is the greatest intellect that ever lived in the history of the world, until Jesus Christ. You can't even concede what an unfallen human being has with regard to intellectual and moral potential. That's your representative. And so God was generous even in the construction of the covenant of works. You might say, "Well, I would have done better." Well you're a sinner, and you can't even think about it. You can't even think about how you would have functioned as a non-sinful person. You can't even get out of yourself to think in those categories. And so God was gracious in the way that He constructed this. He gave us this optimal representative in Adam, and even Adam failed.

Secondly, why is it that the imputation of Adam's sin is fair? Because God shows meticulous concern for justice in His covenant of grace. Think about it. In the way that God goes about saving us through Jesus Christ, He shows meticulous concern for justice. He doesn't say, "Okay, look, I'm going to sweep those sins under the closet. It's kind of the good ole boys club, where you messed up, and they say ah, we're going to just forget it this time." God says, "Okay, I love you so much that My Son is going to bear your sin. Why does He do this? Because He is concerned for justice and fairness. So if, in the way of grace, God is concerned for fairness and justice, is it not reasonable to work back to the fact that in the original relationship that He has sustained with man, that He was concerned with fairness and justice? And in that original relationship, what did He do? He appointed Adam as our representative as the representative of all humanity. It's clear that the covenant of grace and imputation is fair. And, therefore, looking back, you can see that the covenant of works is fair.

I remember being in seminary and a young man was arguing this point with a professor. We had been studying the imputation of Adam's sin, but we hadn't gotten yet to the imputation of Christ's righteousness. In other words, we had been talking about the fact that we were constituted sinners in Adam, but we hadn't yet been talking about the fact that we were constituted as righteous in Jesus Christ. And the young man started arguing with the professor. He said, "It's not fair, I didn't exist when Adam was brought into being in this world. Adam died at least 6,000 years before I was brought into being. It's not fair that what he did would impact me. And the professor said, "Well, let me ask you this. Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Absolutely. Do you believe in Christ alone for salvation? Absolutely. Do you trust in what Jesus did and was for your salvation? Yes. Let me ask you a question. Were you alive when Jesus was alive? Um, no. Did you exist when Jesus came to this earth to live and die on your behalf? No. Is Jesus' righteousness imputed to you. Yes. I don't know what you're complaining about." You get the point. You're willing to accept the gracious imputation of the righteousness of Christ, but you've got real problems with the imputation of this

Adam's sin business. You didn't even exist when he did. You didn't exist when Christ did what He did, but you know what? Paul in this passage is going to tell you that if you're a believer, you are clothed in His righteousness. So working back from the covenant of grace, to the covenant of works is another indication that it is fair.

Thirdly, there are biblical patterns that establish this, and teach us to expect us to expect this kind of representation on the part of others. There are numerous Biblical examples that show us the principles of representation. For instance, David and Goliath. David stands in for the army of Israel. Goliath for the army of Philistia. David wins, Israel wins. Goliath wins, Philistia wins. One man loses, one nation loses. One man wins, one nation wins. Not fair. That's the way it was. David and Goliath provide an example. What about Abraham and his descendants? Abraham believes God. Abraham obeys God and his descendants are blessed and become God's chosen people for evermore. Well, hold on, what about his descendants? Abraham believed, his descendants are blessed. Think again of David, in a less than favorable way this time. In I Chronicles 21 David takes the census. He's proud. He wants to see how many army men he has. So David takes a census and 70,000 citizens of Jerusalem die. David the King, the representative, the head, sins, and Israelites die. Over and over in the Bible we see these principles. Pharaoh opposes God. You live in a mud hut in the south of Egypt, and you're an Egyptian and you pay because of his sin. Over and over we see the principle of representation in the Bible.

Fourthly, as we've just said in looking at verse 19, it's not simply that we are imputed the guilt of Adam's sin. We are made sinners in Adam. We are not only representatively sinners in Adam, but Paul tells us in Romans 5:19 that we are actually sinners in Adam. So we can't say, O, Lord, we're just innocent bystanders, victims here. There was a car wreck, and we just happened to see it. We're involved in this thing. No, we were driving the vehicle. We are sinners in Adam.

Fifth and finally believers. The character of God guarantees the justice of all His actions. There are going to be many things in this life that you can ask me about that I'm going to answer you by, "I don't know, I don't have a clue But the character of God guarantees that He will do what is right. And when there are areas of mystery that we do not understand, we are on very good ground to assume God to be doing that which is right because He has proven Himself to us in the way that He dealt with us in His Son. So for all those reasons, let me argue that it is perfectly appropriate to accept as fair, the imputation of Adam's sin.

Now to unbelievers, very briefly. I've got three things that I'd like to say. You're sitting here saying, "Well, this is not fair." I want to say three things. First, you're not in a position to judge. You are standing in the dock. You are standing before the bar of God's justice. You're not here to judge the judge. You can't extract yourself from this situation. But let me say this. He is so sovereign that even if it

were unfair, there would be nothing that you could do about it. Because He's the judge, He's in charge, that's just the way it is. Think of it, He's sitting around in the time of Moses, and He decides that He's going to take on the most powerful kingdom that ever lived, or ever was in that day, the king of Egypt. And He says, let Me see, how am I going to take down Egypt? I think I'll send frogs. That's how sovereign He is. He can decide He's going to wipe out the most powerful kingdom in the world. How does He do it? I think I will send frogs. God is sovereign. God has every capacity to bring you to the bar of justice.

Secondly, because of your sin, my unbelieving friends, you can't even think past the fall to think about fair. You can't get over the fact that we have fallen and get back into an unfallen world and think about how justice would have worked there. You can't even think there, your mind is darkened by sin. You are involved in sin. It's like a person who is slipping into dementia being asked to work through problems for which he no longer has the capacity to contemplate. They forgot where they were fifteen minutes ago. They forgot what they ate ten minutes ago. They forgot to whom they spoke five minutes ago. That's you in a fallen world. You don't even have the capacity to think about what's fair.

Thirdly, and finally, let me say that for unbelievers, there is often a voice that says, "That's not fair, reject Him." And I want to say that that voice has been heard before in human history. That voice once said to Eve, that's not fair, reject Him. And I can categorically, without having any prophetic powers or omniscience today say that voice that is whispering in your ear, "That's not fair reject Him," that's the voice of the evil one, the enemy of your soul, Satan who is seeking to destroy you. That is not a word of somebody who cares about you, that is someone who wants to destroy you. And for all those reasons, I believe that your only wise response is to accept what God has said in His word, and flee to Christ for grace.

III. We must look away from our own deeds and righteousness to the act of the One Man - Your Only Hope

And that leads me to the last thing that I'd like to say today. And you'll see it at the end of verse 18 and the end of verse 19, and that is your only hope. Salvation is by works my friend, salvation is by works, or rather by *one* work. Salvation is by the one work of the one man, Jesus Christ. It is not by your works, it is by His one work. The work of which the complex is represented in His life and in His death on our behalf; and, therefore, we must look ahead from our own deeds and our own righteousness to the act of the one man for salvation.

Let me ask you to do one thing. Take your hymnals out and look at number 92. If you look at the second stanza of number 92, this is "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." And interestingly enough, the hymn that we are about to sing, makes the same point. But you know this hymn by heart, so let me just remind you of it.

Hymn 92, stanza 2, notice what Luther says: "Did we in our own strength confide our striving would be losing. We are not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing. Just ask who that may be, Christ Jesus, that is He. Lord Sabaoth His name, from age to age the same, and He must win the battle." What is Luther doing? He is summarizing for you Paul's argument from Romans 5:12 to 19. And it is simply this: In your own strength confide, and you will lose. Trust in your own works, and you will lose. Seek to be righteous before God in your own strength, and you will lose, unless you run from your works to the one man, the one work, the right man, Jesus Christ.

But He will, in fact we can say, He *has won* the battle. Now Paul's whole point in this passage is you flee from your works. You make a heap of all your bad works; and all your good works, and you flee from them to the one work of Jesus Christ which alone saves. May God bless you as you do. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, grant that we would seek our only hope in Jesus Christ, receiving Your grace, accomplished by Him alone, by faith in Him alone. We ask it in His name, Amen.

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