

## **Romans: Grace Reigns in Righteousness**

**Romans 5:21**

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*April 8, 2001*

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with to Romans, chapter 5. Before we hear the scripture this morning, I want to do two things. I want to remind you where Paul has come in his overall, and then I want to walk you through the five points of his argument that begin at the end of verse 20 and run through verse 21. You will remember that in Romans, chapter 1 and 2, Paul has told us about our predicament. He has told us about the fact that we know God, and we ought to worship and adore Him, but we don't, and He makes clear that that predicament is universal. No one is righteous, no, not one. In Romans, chapter 3, he tells us God's solution to that particular predicament. In His mercy He grants through His Son's atoning grace to those who trust in Him, and He accepts them as righteous because of Him. In other words, he teaches justification by faith in Romans, chapter 3.

Then in Romans, chapter 4, he defends that doctrine from Scripture, that is, from the Old Testament. He wants to make it clear that this is not an idea that he thought up, it's one that's rooted in God's redemptive design as far back as the covenant made with Abraham. And so he shows from the Old Testament, both from the life of Abraham and from the life of David, that this has always been God's way of saving. There's one of salvation in all days, in all ages, and that way is grace. He defends that in Romans, chapter 4.

Then in Romans, chapter 5, in the first eleven verses he wants to talk about some of the implications of this truth of justification by faith, this salvation by grace that he has been talking about. And so he tells us some things. He says justification by faith results in our having peace with God. He tells us that it enables us to rejoice even in sufferings. He tells us that it results in our communing with God. He tells us that it results in our security. The believer has a certain hope of future glory all because of justification. He wants us to sense something of the significance, something of the impact of this glorious truth of justification, this glorious reality of justification for all those who trust in Jesus Christ.

Then, in Romans, chapter 5, from verse 12 all the way to the end of the chapter,

where we find ourselves today, we see Paul step back and say, I want to tell you one more time why it is that salvation can only be by grace alone, and why it is that your righteousness is not the vehicle of your reentering into a pleasant and blessed relationship of communion with God. Why it is that only through Christ can you be brought into a relationship of communion and blessing with God. And so by paralleling Adam and Christ, he says all who are in Adam under the reign of sin, the law condemns them, God condemns them for their disobedience. The result is death and final condemnation. But all who are in Christ, all those who have been united to Him by the Holy Spirit by Faith, what do they find? They find instead of condemnation, justification. They find instead of death, life. They find instead of separation from God, communion with God. And so he makes it clear that everyone who is in Adam, everyone who is still under the bonds of sin, there is nothing that they can do in their own righteousness to reenter into a relationship of blessedness with God, because they are the problem. You are the problem is what Paul is saying once again. But all those who are in Christ have turned away from themselves and looked to Him for their only hope of salvation. And thus Paul again shows us the glorious importance of salvation by grace alone by faith alone in Christ alone.

And that brings us to Romans 5:21, the end of His argument. But to pick up the full argument, in this verse, you need to look at the last phrase of verse 20. So let's look at that verse together. The last phrase of that verse is grace abounded all the more. That phrase is very important for the first part of verse 21. Grace abounded all the more so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness. Paul's argument in the section that we are going to look at today has five parts. It's very simple, but because Paul uses so few words to explain so much more to his truth, let's just have clear in our mind the five parts of his argument.

His argument is first, 'grace abounded.' That's argument part one. Grace abounded. Here's part two: 'Grace abounded so that grace might reign.' That's the second part of it. The reason that grace abounded is so that grace might reign. Third part of His argument: 'Grace abounded so that grace might reign through the righteousness of Christ.' Now you're looking down at your passage, and it just says 'through the righteousness of Christ.' And you're saying, where did you get this 'through the righteousness of Christ?' Well, I'll defend that in a minute, but just wait. Fourth part of the argument: 'to eternal life.' The result of this reign of the righteousness of Christ will be eternal life for all those who believe. And then the fifth part of the argument: 'through Jesus Christ our Lord.' Through the mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. And again, you are saying what is that 'mediation' thing? I'll defend that in a minute, but here's the five parts of Paul's argument: Grace abounded so that grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Get that outline and you've got the whole thing. So let's hear God's word here in Romans, chapter 5, verse 21:

"That as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

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

Father, this is Your Word, and we ask that by the Spirit You would open our eyes to understand it. We pray, O God, that all those who are believers on the name of the Savior, Jesus Christ, would be strengthened by a deeper understanding of the workings of the operations of the purposes of Your grace. And we pray that those who are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, would be so stung by a sense of their sin and need, that they themselves would be compelled to flee to the only one who can help them, Jesus Christ. And find in Him more than they ever imagined. These things we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

The function of Paul's words in this little verse, Romans 5:21 is to tell you the purpose of super-abounding grace. In other words, Paul, in Romans 5:21 is going to tell you why grace abounded. Why did it much more abound? Why did grace super-abound in comparison to sin? Paul is going to answer those questions in two parts in this one little verse. The first part focuses on the reign of sin. The second part focuses on the reign of grace. I'd like you to see three or four very important things today.

### **I. The reign of sin is an ugly thing.**

First, let's look at the first little phrase in verse 21, "So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace." Paul is reminding us again in Romans 5:12 through 21 for the last time that the reign of sin is an ugly thing. The reign of sin is what Paul is referring to one more time in contrast to the reign of Christ in grace, and He is telling us again that sin reigned in death. Sin dominates us when we are in Adam. Sin dominates us when we are under the law, when the law is our enemy. Paul characterizes life before Christ, he characterizes life apart from Christ in terms of the reign of sin. In other words, he is saying, "Sin's relationship to you is like the reign of an absolute monarch. It completely controls you. You don't stand a chance. It has its way. If you could picture sin as a weight, many times the weight of your body, so much greater than the weight of your body that you could never lift yourself. You are flat on your back, and the weight is on you. You can't get it off. That's the picture of sin that Paul paints for you. You are totally dominated by it. There's nothing that you can do. And Paul is saying that because that's the problem, of course, your works can't fix the problem, because you can't lift the weight. It's too much for you. Sin totally dominates you. Don't tell me about you helping yourself in that situation. The whole point is you can't. You are totally morally dominated by this force of sin. It's not a pretty picture.

But then Paul goes on to say the result of this reign of sin is death. Death is both

the natural consequence of sin, but it is also the express judgment of God against sin. Sin so often paints itself as something desirable, something liberated. "Ah, go on and do what you want. Don't let those fundamentalists ruin your life," perhaps you have said to you. Perhaps somebody's whispered that in your ear or perhaps someone has whispered that in your heart. Sin presents itself as attractive but it always results in the reign of death.

First there's the law of diminishing returns. As you go the way that you want to do and suddenly you find that you have to do more and more to satisfy, and then finally you get to a point where you can't be satisfied. And then there's that law of self-destruction which is woven into sin itself. Where sin, though it presents itself as something that is going to enrich you, eventually destroys you, it takes you apart, limb from limb; and it finally results in death. William Plumber, a great Southern Presbyterian commentator on the book of Romans describes it this way: "Look at how sin has reigned unto death in history. It is written in every graveyard, in every hospital, in every disease, in every groan, in every tormenting apprehension awakened by a guilty conscience, in every prison house of despair." So Paul for one more time has drawn attention to this reign of sin.

But the reason that he draws your attention to the reign of sin is because he wants to contrast it. The reason that he has brought this subject up again is not for you to fixate on it, but he wants to point you to a contrast. His purpose is to show you, look at the first verses, the first words of the verse, "So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace." In other words, Paul wants to draw your attention to the fact that God did something good even with the reign of sin. That's how awesome it is. That He was able to do something good even with the reign of sin? What was it? He made it to serve the interests of the exultation of His grace.

Think about it. No man was ever more miserable than the prodigal son when he realized what he had done and been to his father. And when he came to the realization of the reign of sin in his life, it crushed him. But precisely because he realized the reign of sin in His life. Do you realize the impact of the sight of the outstretched arms of his father upon him? A man who finally knew that they he didn't deserve a father like that. Suddenly being welcomed back. You see the reign of sin taken away as the Holy Spirit came and granted the peace of repentance in that man's life, became the very thing that accentuated the grace of God. He suddenly realized, "This is mind-boggling. My father's welcoming back me back as a son, and he's welcoming me back with a celebration. This is mind-boggling."

And think about that repentant publican, that repentant tax collector, hated by the Jewish people. In the temple, a betrayer of his own people, and suddenly he is struck by the Holy Spirit with the weight of his sin, and he sees the reign of sin in his life, and what does he do? He lifts up this prayer. God have mercy on me, a sinner. While meanwhile the self-righteous Pharisee is saying, "Lord, I thank you

that I'm not like that man." And you see, that Pharisee could never know the reign of grace, because he had never seen the reign of sin in His own heart. But precisely because that publican, that tax collector had seen the reign of sin, the reign of grace was far greater in his eyes. And so God has turned that reign of sin to His own purposes and those in whom He is working the work of faith and repentance, God delights in turning curse into blessing. He delights in liberating us from sin into the freedom of holiness.

And let me say that when we come to the Lord's Table, we are being reminded of just what He has done to break the power of sin, to destroy the reign of sin: The death of His Son. How great must the Father's love must be that He would break the power of sin at such a cost. How great must the power of sin be, that it required such a cost that grace might reign. We celebrate that as we come to the table. That's the first thing that Paul draws to our attention. The reign of sin is an ugly thing. But the reign of grace is greater still.

## **II. By the Law, sin reigned in death, by Christ, grace reigns in eternal life.**

Now I'd like you to look at the second part of the verse for a few moments. "Even so, grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Paul is saying that by the law, in Adam, sin reigned in death but by Christ, grace reigns in eternal life. He's saying that the work of Christ resulted in the reign of grace expressed in eternal life.

Paul tells you something that is four-fold about the reign of grace in the second part of this little verse. He tells you four things about the reign of grace. He tells you that grace reigns over sin, through the righteousness of Christ, in eternal life, and by Jesus Christ. Grace reigns over sin, through the righteousness of Christ, in eternal life and by our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's look at each of those four things as we consider this four-fold reign of grace.

Paul tells us that grace reigns over sin. The whole purpose of the reign of grace is the complete domination of sin in our life. Paul is telling us that the reign of sin is ended through the conquering work of the grace of God to all those who believe. The purpose of grace is to break the power of reigning sin, as one of our favorite hymns says. The purpose of grace is to break the dominion of sin in our lives not merely resulting in our forgiveness, but also resulting in our transformation. God doesn't give us grace so that He can sort of equalize for us, He doesn't give us grace so that we can get back to neutral and then earn our way up. He gives us grace that grace might totally dominate sin in our experience, not only so that we are accepted as righteous, but so also that we actually become conformed to the image of God in Jesus Christ. The purpose of grace is the total domination of sin. There is a hymn in our old hymn book written by Phillip Bliss that began like this: "Free from the law, oh happy condition, Jesus has bled and there is remission." And every word of the stanza of that hymn is

true. By the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we have been granted remission, we've been forgiven of sins. But that is not the whole story of grace. There's more. It's a package deal, and God does not have in view our forgiveness, He has in view our transformation. And the sad thing is that some evangelicals rewrite that verse of the hymn, and they sing it like this: "Free from the law, oh happy condition, I can do as I please now that I've got remission." You see, they want forgiveness, but they don't want transformation. They want the grace of God to set things right, to put them back to the neutral base, but they don't want the transformation of life that comes from grace. But the reign of grace reigns everywhere.

God doesn't forgive us and then leave us in bondage to our sin. He breaks the power of reigning sin. He sets the prisoner free, so that we are forgiven. And the process of transformation is begun. It's not perfect and never will be in this life. It begins, and incessant war with sin in our lives. In fact, it's so incessant, and it's so universal that you can say Christian, if you're not fighting against sin somewhere, you're not a Christian; but it breaks us free from the dominion of that sin, so that it has mastery over us no more. So this is the first thing the reign of grace is a reign over sin. Grace reigns on account of the one righteousness of Christ, righteousness is imputed to us, and has been imparted to us. We are forgiven based on His righteousness, we are credited as righteous on His behalf, and then God begins this glorious work of transformation. Grace reigns over sin.

Secondly, grace reigns through righteousness. Notice it's God's righteousness that is being spoken of here, not our righteousness. Paul's made it clear. Grace can't reign through our righteousness. Our righteousness is the problem. Grace reigns through righteousness. The reign of grace over sin is made possible by, it's made actual by, the righteousness of God. And there are two things to be said about that.

First of all notice that God saves us by His righteousness, not our own. It is the righteousness of God that puts us right with Him again. If our problem is that we are under the weight of sin which has mastery over us, how cruel it would have been if the Lord would say, "Okay, work your way back into a relationship with Me." That's the very problem - we can't. And so he emphasizes that it's His righteousness, not our own by which grace reigns.

Secondly, notice that the way that God shows His grace to us in salvation is perfectly consistent with His righteousness. He saves us in such a way that He doesn't just sweep our sins under the carpet and say, "I'm just going to forget about that, we'll just pretend that didn't happen." He deals with us in such a way that every last penalty for our sin is paid, and every last demand for righteousness is observed all through the work of Jesus Christ. So that when God shows you grace, He did not do it at the expense of His justice and righteousness. He does it in fact, in strict accordance with His justice and righteousness. And the beautiful thing about that is that He gives you more

confidence than His grace, because now having paid the due penalty of sin, it would be wrong for God to visit condemnation and judgment against those for whom that judgment and condemnation has already been born through Jesus Christ. And so He saves us in such a way that His righteousness is exalted, and in no way mitigated.

Thirdly, this reign of grace is through eternal life, or in eternal life. This results in an eternal life begun in us now. It is life that death cannot invade, a life that cannot be forfeited. If grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life, does that not in and of itself speak of the security of the believer? Sin reigned in death. If grace reigns to eternal life, then who can be against us? And who can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. If the result of the reign of grace is eternal life, does that not speak to the assurance of the believer, security of the believer, the perseverance of the believer. If the purpose of grace for reigning in your life is to give you eternal life, does that not comfort you that God will bring to completion that which He has begun in you?

And finally, grace reigns by the mediation of Jesus Christ, our Lord. It's almost redundant. Paul has said, what, thirty-nine times in the last five verses? It's all through Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul comes to the end of this chapter, he's getting ready to launch into a new thought, and he can't resist saying it one more time. All of this is by Jesus Christ, our Lord. The supreme manifestation of the righteousness of God is in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is His person and work that has secured our acceptance with God, because His righteousness is credited to our account. It is imputed to us, and, therefore, we are accepted as righteousness. 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. No, my friends, Paul then turns to you and says, "Now explain to me again how it is that you are going to commend yourself to God by your good works. And he says, "Look, that's fine. Go ahead and do this. All you have to do is be as righteous and as perfect as Jesus Christ, and I promise you, He'll accept you. There's your good news. You just be as righteous as Jesus Christ, and He'll accept you.

But I've got better news. There's another way. You run from your own righteousness, and you run from your own deserved condemnation, and you run to Jesus Christ who will give you a supply of all the righteousness you need. And He'll unite you again in communion with your God. Here's what you do. You trust in Him, and it will change everything in your life. It will result in forgiveness, it will result in transformation, it will result in a new communion with God that you've never experienced before.

If that's where you are today, my friend, I want to urge you, there's only way to run. There's only one to run to, it's Jesus Christ, because your righteousness will not do. Unless you are ready to stand before God and say, "My righteousness has equaled and perhaps excelled the righteousness of Your own Son. Any

takers? Do I flee to Christ? As Dixon told us so long ago, "I make a heap of all my works, all my good works and all my bad works, and I flee from them to Jesus Christ." That is the way of salvation. May God bless you to understanding and respond. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for Your word, we thank You for the truth, for the encouragement of this verse, and we ask that You would burn it into our experience onto our hearts. For Christ's sake, Amen.

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