



Sunday School Lesson
Rom. 5:12-21
 by Lorin L. Cranford
 All rights reserved ©

Sin Is



A copy of this lesson is posted in Adobe pdf format at <http://cranfordville.com> under Bible Studies in the Bible Study Aids section. A note about the blue, underlined material: These are hyperlinks that allow you to click them on and bring up the specified scripture passage automatically while working inside the pdf file connected to the internet. Just use your web browser's back arrow or the taskbar to return to the lesson material.

Quick Links to the Study

I. Context

- a. Historical
- b. Literary

II. Message

- a. Death Reigns, vv. 12-14
- b. God's gift of grace, vv. 15-17
- c. Calvary trumps Eden, vv. 18-21

This lesson begins a series of three lessons from Romans chapters four and five under the heading "Preparing for Easter" in the Formations series of the Smyth-Helwys Sunday School lessons. Human sinfulness and God's redeeming grace are the two themes dominating these chapters of Romans. Faith is the key to resolving the tension between these two polar centers of religious experience. The death of Christ who becomes the object of that faith stands dead center.

I. Context

The background and setting of our passage offers some interesting insights that can be helpful to understand the ideas set forth in chapter five.

a. Historical

The writing of the letter to the communities of believers in the imperial capital of the world in the mid-first century is relatively easy to understand with the traditional reporter type questions: who? what? when? where? why? These have to do with the **external history** of this document. Since the beginning of the era of modern critical scholarship in the 1700s, New Testament scholars in the western world have virtually universally acknowledged the role of Paul in the composition of this document, along with that of 1 & 2 Corinthians and Galatians. These are often labeled "the big four."

Thus what are the answers to these questions? Let's begin with the when and where questions. In the Chronology of Paul's Life and Ministry page at Cranfordville.com, Romans will fall toward the end of the third missionary journey:

II. Paul's middle period of ministry

A. The second missionary journey (ca. AD 48-51), Acts 15:36-18:22

- 1. Ministry in Syria and Cilicia, Acts 15:41
- 2. Ministry in Galatia and Mysia, Acts 16:1-10; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:5-6; 1 Cor.16:1
- 3. Ministry in Macedonia, Acts 16:11-17:14; Phil 4:15-16
 - a. Work in Philippi, Acts 16:12-40; Phil. 1:4-6; 1 Thess 2:2
 - b. Work in Thessalonica, Acts 17:1-9; 1 Thess 1:4-2:20; 2 Thess 2:6, 3:7-10
 - c. Work in Berea, Acts 17:10-14
- 4. Ministry in Achaia, Acts 17:15-18:17
 - a. Work in Athens, Acts 17:15-34; 1 Thess 3:1-5
 - b. Work in Corinth, Acts 18:1-17; 1 Thess 3:6-13; 1 Cor 2:1-5; 1:13-17; 2 Thess 3:1-5; 1 Cor 3:5-10; 11:2,23; 15:1; 2 Cor 11:7-9
- 5. Return back to Antioch, Acts 18:18-22

B. The third missionary journey (ca AD 52-57), Acts 18:23-21:16

- 1. Ministry in Galatia-Phrygia (AD 52), Acts 18:23
- 2. Ministry in Asia (AD 52-55)4, Acts 19:1-20:1; 1 Cor 1:11-12; 4:11-13,17; 16:10-12,17-18; 2 Cor 1:8-11, 15-

17 (plans), 23; 2 Cor 12:18; 15:32 3.

3. **Ministry in Macedonia and Achaia (AD 55-57)**, Acts 20:1-3; 1 Cor 16:5-7 (plans); 2 Cor 2:12-13; 7:5-7, 13-16; 8:1-7; 8:16-9:15 (plans); 13:1-3 (plans)

4. Return to Jerusalem (AD 57), Acts 20:3-21:16; 1 Cor 16:3-4 (plans); Rom 16:31 (plans)

Thus when Paul was finishing up his ministry in Corinth at the turning-around point of the third missionary journey in AD 57, Romans was written as a letter of introduction of the apostle to a community of faith that he had not yet personally visited. Luke provides a brief description of this ministry in Corinth in [Acts 20:2-3](#) (NRSV):

1 After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples; and after encouraging them and saying farewell, he left for Macedonia. 2 When he had gone through those regions and had given the believers much encouragement, **he came to Greece, 3 where he stayed for three months. He was about to set sail for Syria when a plot was made against him by the Jews.** [ἤλθεν εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα ποιήσας τε μῆνας τρεῖς· γενομένης ἐπιβουλῆς αὐτῷ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων μέλλοντι ἀνάγεσθαι εἰς τὴν Συρίαν,] and so he decided to return through Macedonia. 4 He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Beroea, by Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, by Gaius from Derbe, and by Timothy, as well as by Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia. 5 They went ahead and were waiting for us in Troas; 6 but we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we joined them in Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

From such a limited statement we can glean very few details of what took place during this three month stay in Corinth. The one thing Luke stresses is that Paul managed to upset the Jewish synagogue leaders enough for them to hatch a plot to get rid of him.

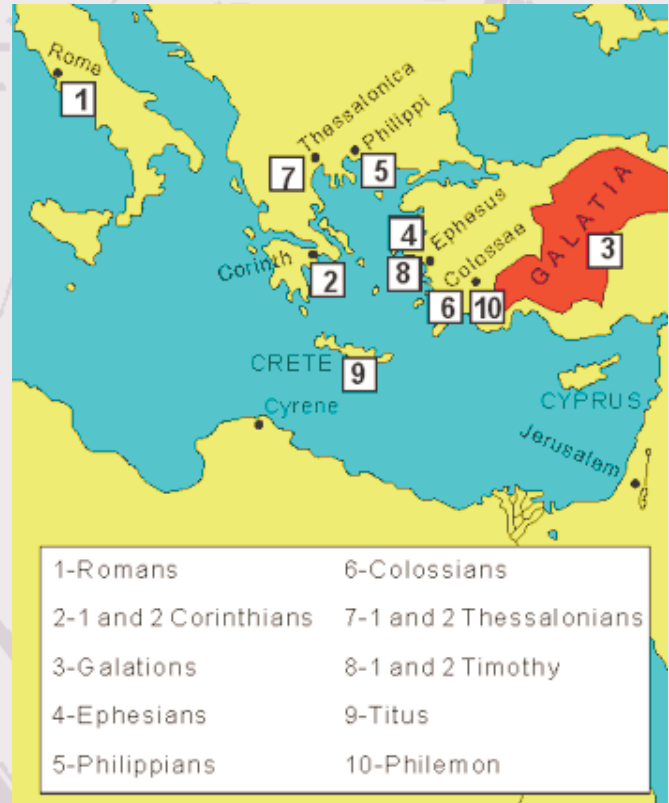
Earlier in [1 Cor. 16:5-9](#) he had sketched out his plans to travel to Corinth from Ephesus (NRSV):

5 I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, 6 and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way, wherever I go. 7 I do not want to see you now just in passing, for I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. 8 But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

In [Rom. 15:22-29](#), Paul described his plans at the time of the writing to the Romans (NRSV):

22 This is the reason that I have so often been hindered from coming to you. 23 But now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you 24 when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while. 25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; 26 for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things. 28 So, when I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will set out by way of you to Spain; 29 and I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

When stitching the bits of information together along with several other pieces, the following picture emerges. Paul was at Corinth and was making plans for the future. These plans most immediately focused on taking the substantial “relief offering” to the Christians in Palestine who were suffering greatly. This offering had been collected from the churches in three Roman provinces: Asia (Ephesus), Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea) and Achaia (Athens, Corinth). As he mentions in verse 28, his plan was to come to Rome on his way to Spain in order to spend the rest of his career evangelizing the western side of the Mediterra-



nean Sea, just as his first three missionary endeavors had focused on the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea. Most take his words here and elsewhere to suggest that he had hoped that the church at Rome would become the launchpad for that ministry, just as Antioch in Syria had been for the first three missionary endeavors. Of course, God had other plans for Paul and it is doubtful that Paul ever visited Spain, although some early church traditions suggest that he did.

Another interesting insight about the composition of Romans comes from [Rom. 16:22](#) (NRSV): “[22 I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord](#)” [ἀσπάζομαι ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ Τέρτιος ὁ γράψας τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἐν κυρίῳ.] With this statement, we get a glance into the way the more formal ancient letters were written in the ancient world. The actual writer of this letter was [Tertius](#), not Paul. Most ancient letters of a formal nature were dictated by the sender of the letter (cf. [Rom. 1:1](#)) to a writing secretary (in this case Tertius). Usually, the broad outline of the contents of the body of the letter would be sketched out by the sender and the writing secretary would “flesh out” the outline in the writing of the letter, especially the body section. Once this -- usually after several revisions -- had been approved by the sender, the letter would then be sent to its destination. Since this is the only place where Tertius’ name is mentioned in the New Testament, we don’t know any more about him than the one fact that he did the actual writing of the book of Romans.

The origins of the Christian community in Rome are hidden from our knowledge. Prof. Werner Kümmerle (*Introduction to the New Testament*, iPreach) has a helpful summation of the available information:

The earliest sure attestation of the existence of a Roman community is Rom itself, followed by Acts 28:15 with the report that Christians from there brought Paul to Rome. In Rom 15:22 f (cf. 1:13) Paul writes that he had for many years intended to come to the brethren in Rome, which implies that there must have been Christians in the capital of the Imperium Romanum as early as the fifties. Probably the remark of the Roman writer Suetonius in his *Life of Claudius*, 25 (ca. 120), leads still farther back: [Claudius] *Judaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Rom. expulit* (=Claudius expelled the Jews from Rom. since they had been continually causing disturbances at the instigation of a certain Chrestos”). Since Chrestos can be another way of writing Christos, so that the names are the same, Suetonius is likely concerned, not with a Jewish insurrectionist in Rom. by the name of Chrestos,² but with Jesus Christ, whose gospel had brought great unrest to the Jewish community in Rome, thus providing the occasion for the Emperor Claudius to expel the Jews or a segment of them. The report, which is not quite clear, is based on inexact information of the Gentile writer. This information does not necessitate the inference that Christianity first reached Rom. shortly before the edict of Claudius, which occurred in the year 49 (see §13), but it had spread effectively among the Roman Jews by that time to the extent that fierce struggles arose between those who held to the old faith and those with faith in Christ.

In any case Peter was neither the founder of the Roman church nor had he been active in Rom. before Paul wrote Rom. Against the assumption that Peter had conducted a mission in Rom. before Paul³ is the evidence of Gal 2:7; Rom 15:20; 2 Cor 10:15 f (Paul will not intrude on someone else’s mission territory); and 1 Cor 9:5, where the itinerant missionary preaching of Peter is mentioned, but nothing is said of his settling down in a community founded by him.

Rom nowhere mentions any persons to whom the community is indebted for the gospel, even at those points where it might be expected: e.g., 1:8 ff; 15:14 ff. Probably Christianity entered the capital of the Empire, not through a particular apostle or missionary, but very early on the streams of world commerce through the instrumentality of the great Jewish Diaspora at Rome. A sign of the religious ties between the Roman Jews of the Diaspora and Jerusalem is perhaps the fact that there was in Jerusalem a Synagogue of the Libertines (Acts 6:9) which is understood by many scholars to represent in the main the descendants of Jews who had been dragged off to Rom. as prisoners of war by Pompey in 61 B.C. Later they were released and formed a powerful element in the Roman Jewish community.⁴ Christianity in Rom. had a stretch of history already behind it when Paul wrote his Letter to the Romans.

But by AD 57 it appears to have been a thriving Christian community made up of numerous house-church groups, as the long list of house-church leaders greeted in [chapter 16](#) indicates. Interestingly, about half of those leaders were women. These communities appear to have contained both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians, but in what mixture no one knows with certainty. The contents of Romans itself addresses issues related clearly to both ethnic groups.

Since 5:12-22 contains little if any **internal history** aspects as a didactic rather than a narrative text, the internal history concerns are not present for the study of these verses. The occasional aspects that do surface will be treated in the Message section.

b. Literary

The literary context for 5:12-21 is important to understand. These verses are some of the most difficult to understand clearly in all the writings of Paul in the New Testament.

The structure of the letter falls into the following segments of the ancient letter form, as outlined in the page on Paul's [Middle Period of Writing](#) at Cranfordville.com:

- Praescriptio, 1:1-7
 - Superscriptio, vv. 1-6
 - Adscriptio, v. 7a
 - Salutatio, v. 7b
- Proem, 1:8-15
- Body, 1:16-15:33
- Conclusio, 16:1-27

Thus 5:12-21 is a segment of the Body section of the letter. The arrangement of the contents of the Body of the letter typically are understood around a twofold division: chaps. 1-11 are doctrinally oriented while chaps 12-15 are mainly behavior oriented. Again, Prof. Kümmel has a helpful summation:

After a prescript expanded to set forth the content of the gospel (1:1-7) and an expression of thanks (1:8-15) which explains how Paul came to write this letter, the theme of the letter is stated (1:16-17): "The gospel is a power of God to effect salvation for everyone who believes, since in it God's setting things right on the ground of faith is revealed for Jews and Greeks." The development of the theme offers first the positive and negative evidence of God's saving act in Christ, which alone makes possible justification by faith (1:18-4:25). On the negative side it is shown (1:18-3:20) that those outside the gospel stand under the wrath of God. Then follows the positive evidence (3:21-4:25): the new justifying act based on grace through faith in Christ (3:21-26) through God's new revelation of faith all self-pride in excluded (3:27-30); the objection that the Law is rendered ineffective is contradicted by reference to Abraham, who was justified on the basis of faith. Following this evidence of the grounding of redemption in the saving act of God is the portrayal of the reality of the new being of Christians (5:1-8:39).¹ Paul shows first that with justification is given assurance of redemption (5:1-11); Christ as the Second Adam brings the justification which brings life much more certainly than Adam brought death to all men (5:12-21). The objection that the proclamation of justification based on grace alone makes sin a matter of no concern is countered by Paul: the new life is basically freed from sin on the basis of baptism (6:1-14); it is obedience and service (6:15-23); it is freedom from the Law (7:1-6), which effects only sin and death in men who are under it (the Law), but which no longer has power, thanks to the saving act of Christ (7:7-25); whoever is ruled by the Spirit is free from sin and death (8:1-11); possession of the Spirit guarantees certainty of redemption (8:12-17); in this way the hope of eternal salvation is certainly guaranteed (8:18-30), for which Paul offers joyous thanks (8:31-39).

Paul turns then in 9-11 to the question of the basis of the Jews' unbelief in the dawning time of salvation. The inconceivable fact of the present rejection of Israel is contrasted with her redemptive benefits (9:1-5 but in rejecting the Jews God has not gone back on his promise to Israel, and he has the freedom to reject (9:6-29); human guilt is the real cause of the rejection (9:30-10:21); but the rejection of the Jews is only a provisional measure in the divine redemptive plan (11:1-32); a hymn brings to a close this line of thought (11:33-36).

With 12:1-2 Paul introduces a string of paraenetic statements: general admonitions for the behavior of Christians to one another (12:3-13); basic principles for the position of Christians in relation to non-Christians (12:14-21); obligations of Christians toward those who hold the power of the state (13:1-7); love of neighbor as the highest obligation (13:8-10); the nearness of the End as motivation for moral seriousness (13:11-14). In 14:1-15:6 the concrete question of the strong and the weak in the Roman community is discussed: warning to those weak in faith (14:1-12); admonition to those strong in faith (14:11-15:6); general admonition with reference to the example of Christ (15:7-13). In the personal conclusion Paul justifies his writing (15:14-21), mentions his travel plans, and announces his visit to Rom. (15:22-33). In 16:1-2 he commends Phoebe; 16:3-16 consists of greetings; 16:17-20 is a warning about false teachers; 16:21-24 brings greetings from Paul's associates; 16:25-27, a doxology.

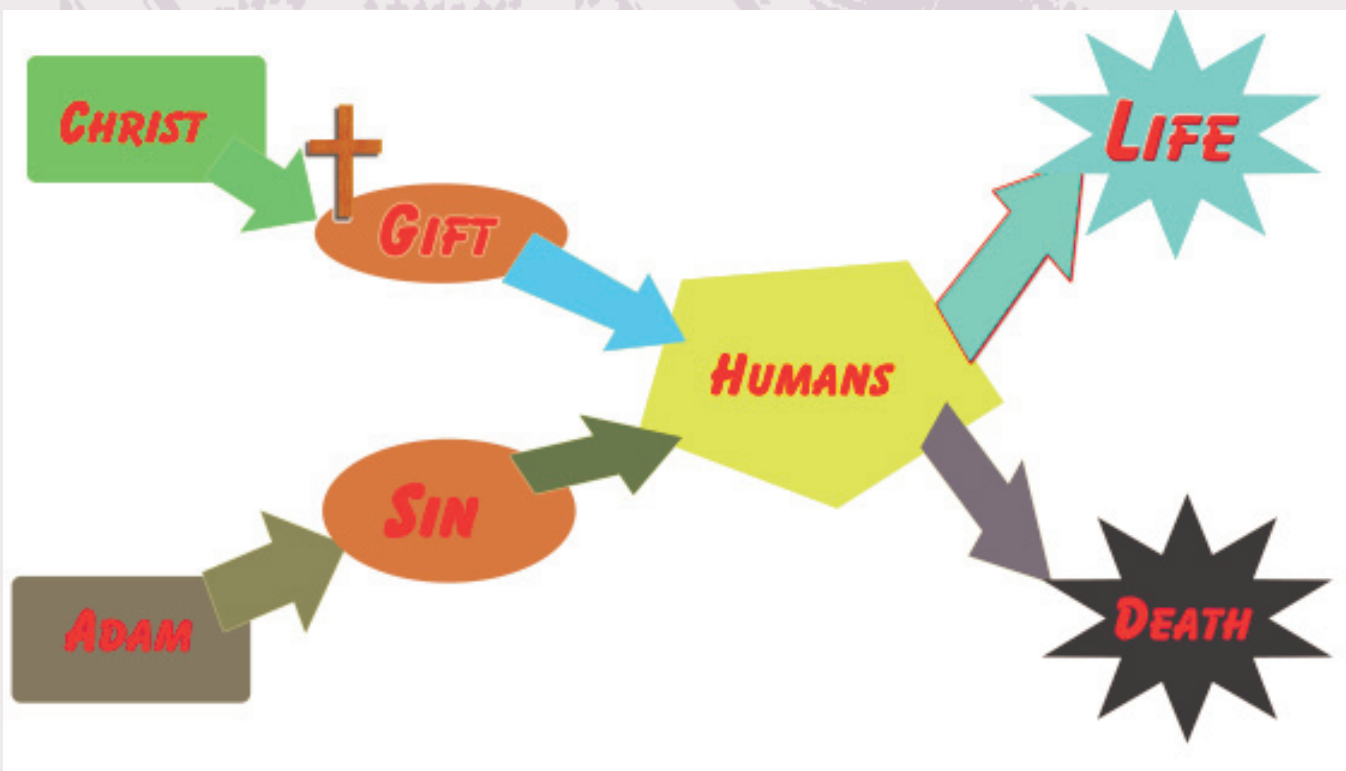
In order to get a better sense of the thought flow, the outline of Romans that I published years ago in a two volume study manual on the New Testament can be of some help:

- Introduction 1:1-17
- I. **Redemption needed 1:18-3:20**
- II. **Redemption provided 3:21-8:39**
 - A. Justification of the sinner (3:21-5:21)
 - 1. Its method (3:21-31)
 - 2. Its example (4:1-25)

- 3. Its results (5:1-11)
- 4. Its basis (5: 12-21)
- B. Sanctification of the believer (6:1-8:39)
 - 1. The believer and sin (6:1-23)
 - 2. The believer and the law (7:1-25)
 - 3. The believer and the Holy Spirit (8 1-39)
- III. Redemption and a problem 9:1-11:36
- IV. Redemption applied 12:1-15:13
- Conclusio (16:1-27)

Hopefully what one can see from these summaries of the thought flow is that our passage, 5:12-21, is vitally linked to what precedes and to what follows. These verses must not be lifted out of this context, if they are to be understood accurately. Most importantly the immediately preceding pericope, 5:1-11, plays an important role in developing a starting point for our passage. And of central importance is the foundational statement in 5:1-2 (NRSV): “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.” The focal point is the enjoyment of peace with God brought about by justification before God. This “being made right with God” (= justification) has come about first through the death of Christ (3:21-31) and secondly because we as believers have put our faith in this crucified and resurrected Christ. In being made right with God by Christ we have gained access to God’s grace that allows us to stand in the presence of the Almighty. And this privilege of standing in God’s presence now in limited ways will be fully realized in eternity after death and resurrection. Having made right with God (δικαιωθέντες, 5:1) enables us to live at peace with God because our justification has brought us back to God (τὴν καταλλαγὴν, “reconciliation,” 5:11).

How does one sum up this profoundly rich spiritual experience? Paul seems to try to do so in 5:12-21 around a largely bipolar discussion: Adam and Christ and their connection to humanity as the diagram below attempts to illustrate.



II. Message

As mentioned at the outset of this study, Rom. 5:12-21 is one of the more difficult passages in all of Paul's writings to understand. A part of this is due to our American culture and way of thinking, which has been hugely shaped by individualism. We have trouble grasping connections to other people, outside of the individual choice to relate to others. The mindset of the first century world was much closer to that found today in the Orient and in rural Africa. Individuals gain their identity and value as a part of a group, not in distinction from groups of people as Americans tend to think. The collective thinking of Paul comes to the forefront here as in few other places of his writings. So at least for a moment let's try to do group-thinking rather than individual thinking.

The core thread of thinking by Paul in these verses is illustrated by the graphic on the previous page. We humans stand in solidarity with both Adam and with Christ. One point often made by insightful commentators on these verses is that the parallelism of humanity with Adam on the one side and with Christ on the other side is not set up by Paul in an equal, exact parallelism. We are connected to Adam via physical birth in which we made no choice. But we are connected to Christ only by the deliberate choice of faith surrender to Him. This much is assumed by Paul. Thus no kind of universalism is possible to glean from these verses. That is, all humanity is not automatically saved merely by Christ's death on Calvary, in spite of a few trying to twist these verses to say everyone is saved automatically.

I must confess that analyzing these verses has been one of the tougher challenges coming to me for quite some time. Both the [block diagram](#) and the [semantic diagram](#) located in the extended version of this lesson have been challenging. But the positive aspect is that after struggling to uncover a pattern of thought in these verses, I believe I have a better grasp of the flow of Paul's thought here than ever before.

The rhetorical structure of these verses falls essentially into three segments: 1) Adam's contribution to humanity, vv. 12-14; 2) Christ's contribution to humanity, vv. 15-17; 3) the implication of all this, vv. 18-21. For the basis of this, see the [semantic diagram](#) of the Greek text of this lesson in the online version of the study.

a. Death reigns, vv. 12-14

GNT

5·12 Διὰ τοῦτο ὡςπερ δι' ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος, καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διήλθεν, ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον· 5·13 ἄχρι γὰρ νόμου ἁμαρτία ἦν ἐν κόσμῳ, ἁμαρτία δὲ οὐκ ἐλλογεῖται μὴ ὄντος νόμου, 5·14 ἀλλὰ ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ θάνατος ἀπὸ Ἀδάμ μέχρι Μωϋσέως καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς μὴ ἁμαρτήσαντας ἐπὶ τῷ ὁμοιώματι τῆς παραβάσεως Ἀδάμ ὃς ἐστὶν τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος.

NASB

12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so **death spread** to all men, because all sinned -- 13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

NRSV

12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so **death spread** to all because all have sinned — 13 sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. 14 Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

NLT

12 When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. Adam's sin brought death, so **death spread** to everyone, for everyone sinned. 13 Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. And though there was no law to break, since it had not yet been given, 14 they all died anyway — even though they did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did. What a contrast between Adam and Christ, who was yet to come!

Notes:

The thought structure of these verses -- which comprise a single sentence in the Greek text -- is built on the core idea (main clause in the Greek sentence) toward the end of verse fourteen: "death spread" (ὁ

θάνατος διήλθεν). Critical then is what is meant by “death.” Paul uses [the term](#) “death” some 58 times in his writings. The [term here](#) in Greek, ὁ θάνατος, is the most commonly used term. In our passage two things are asserted about death: (1) it has spread into all humanity; and (2) it reigns. For Paul the term is all encompassing. [Death](#) is what happens to the physical side of animate beings at the end of life. Spiritual death is what follows for those outside of Christ in eternal damnation. But spiritual death doesn’t begin with physical death. In fact, it precedes physical death. As sinful humans we start out in spiritual death, and must be born to spiritual life in order to escape it.

In the first part of verse 12, Paul makes the point clear that death is the consequence of sin and that sin has entered into the human race through Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden. How did Adam’s sin get passed on to all humanity? This leads to the second qualifier at the end of verse 14, which is the controversial statement: ἐφ’ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον. How should this relative clause in Greek be translated? The three translations used above render it along the lines of “because all have sinned.” Certainly, such a translation is possible, and maybe preferable. But the literal rendering would read “in whom all have sinned.” The American cultural conditioning of individualism makes most folk on this side of the Atlantic uncomfortable with this second translation. But early on in Christian interpretative history, when a group mindset rather than an individualist mindset dominated, this was the normal rendering of the phrase. Unfortunately, out of this grew some doctrinal beliefs that are hard to justify in the scripture. The church father Augustine in the fourth century saw in this view of the phrase the basis for what became the doctrine of original sin by the Roman Catholic Church. Everyone is born a sinner by virtue of his/her kinship ultimately to the sinful Adam. This line of thinking preceded Christianity, however. Its beginnings can be traced back to the Judaism before the Christian era. What Augustine added to this was the necessity of infant baptism in order to cover original sin; confirmation then lays the foundation for covering the individual Christian’s own sinful actions through confession and penance. These latter additions clearly have no foundation in scripture, and most Protestants have rightly rejected these ideas. But often the tendency has been to adopt the first translation of these verses in order to counter the Roman Catholic viewpoint more forcefully. But one can’t legitimately adopt a viewpoint just based on reaction to a later misinterpretation of a scripture statement. The corporate solidarity perspective of Paul and his world would argue for the correctness of “in whom all have sinned.”

In verses 13 and 14, Paul’s concern was to defend his assertion that sin has entered in humanity prior to the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. To the Jewish readers of this letter initially, how sin could be counted before Sinai was a larger issue, since in Jewish tradition a major function of the Law was to define certain actions as sinful and thus an act of rebellion against God. Paul’s point is vigorous: sin was infecting all humanity from Adam to Moses; wrongful actions were indeed acts of sin. And death as a consequence of sin reigned over everyone during that time period, even though their sinfulness wasn’t quite the same as Adam’s since he violated an explicitly given order to God.

One clear implication of these verses is that for Paul [sin](#) is something far deeper than a wrong action. Through our connection with Adam we have been infected with a deadly disease, and that disease produces actions of deliberate rebellion against God’s will for us. [Our flesh](#) (ἡ σαρκίς) is sin’s [base of operation](#) and corrupts human life profoundly.

In summary, Paul makes a foundational point. All humanity is sinful. That sinfulness is deeply rooted in our connection to Adam and has been made worse by our own actions of rebellion. The outcome of that sinfulness is death. Death reigned before God’s Law was given. The coming of the Law at Sinai only compounded the problem by spelling out the sinful nature of wrong actions. Thus, the implication is clear to our day. All humanity living today is sinful and death in its full meaning here is reigning over them, just as it did from Adam to Moses apart from the revelation of God’s Law defining sinful actions.

b. God’s gift of grace, vv. 15-17

GNT

5:15 Ἄλλ’ οὐχ ὡς τὸ παράπτωμα, οὕτως καὶ τὸ χάρισμα· εἰ γὰρ τῷ τοῦ ἐνὸς παραπτώματι οἱ

NASB

15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the

NRSV

15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man’s trespass,

NLT

15 And what a difference between our sin and God’s generous gift of forgiveness. For this

πολλοὶ ἀπέθανον, πολλῶ μαλλον ἢ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ δωρεὰ ἐν χάριτι τῆ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐπερίσσευσεν. 5·16 καὶ οὐχ ὡς δι' ἐνὸς ἀμαρτήσαντος τὸ δώρημα· τὸ μὲν γὰρ κρίμα ἐξ ἐνὸς εἰς κατάκριμα, τὸ δὲ χάρισμα ἐκ πολλῶν παραπτωμάτων εἰς δικαίωμα. 5·17 εἰ γὰρ τῷ τοῦ ἐνὸς παραπτώματι ὁ θάνατος ἐβασίλευσεν διὰ τοῦ ἐνός, πολλῶ μαλλον οἱ τὴν περισσεῖαν τῆς χάριτος καὶ τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς δικαιοσύνης λαμβάνοντες ἐν ζωῇ βασιλεύουσιν διὰ τοῦ ἐνός Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounds to the many. 16 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. 17 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.

much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. 16 And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. 17 If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

one man, Adam, brought death to many through his sin. But this other man, Jesus Christ, brought forgiveness to many through God's bountiful gift. 16 And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but we have the free gift of being accepted by God, even though we are guilty of many sins. 17 The sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over us, but all who receive God's wonderful, gracious gift of righteousness will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.

Notes:

The thought pattern of these verses, made up of three sentences in the Greek text, revolves mainly around two core assertions: (1) “the free gift is not like the transgression” [οὐχ ὡς τὸ παράπτωμα, οὕτως καὶ τὸ χάρισμα] (v15a), and (2) “The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned” [οὐχ ὡς δι' ἐνός ἀμαρτήσαντος τὸ δώρημα] (v. 16a). Each of these core assertions is defended by a complex of causal expressions.

Important then is understanding what Paul meant by the idea of gift. Three separate terms are used in these three sentences and are translated usually as gift: (1) χάρισμα, [charisma vv. 15, 16]; (2) δωρεὰ [dorea, vv. 15, 17]; and (3) δώρημα [dorema, v. 16]. The first term, **charisma**, is defined as “not like the transgression” (v. 15); “arose from many transgressions and results in justification” (v. 16b). **Dorea** “in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many” (v. 15b), and “those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (v. 17). **Dorema** “is not like the effect of the one man's sin” (v. 16a). Also, the idea of gift is closely linked to the concept of grace, especially with the first word since they flow from the same root stem: χάρισμα, [charisma; ‘gift’] and χάρις [charis; ‘grace’]. What then is Paul alluding to with these terms? Clearly he is pointing to the work of salvation accomplished by Christ in his death on the cross.

The comparative nature of the first core statement (v. 15a), “the free gift is not like the transgression,” is then defended by two statements in v 15b:

(1) “For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God.” The superiority of the gift of grace over the destructive impact of Adam's sin upon humanity is Paul's point. If Adam could have destructive impact, then God's grace abounds even more and has greater potential for good.

(2) “the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.” Thus the positive impact of Jesus' death abounds in greater power and potency for humanity. Here, Paul uses the term “the many” [οἱ πολλοὶ] as a designation of humanity in general, and is referring to his other designation “all men” [πάντες ἄνθρωποι] in v. 12a, and v. 18 (2x). The shift back and forth appears to be for stylistic purposes to avoid

undue repetition of the same term.

The comparative nature of the second core statement (v. 16a), “The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned,” is also defended by two sets of declarations. The first one asserts (v. 16b): “For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification.” From Adam’s sin came condemnation, a part of the idea of death in these verses. Thus we face eternal condemnation through our connection to Adam. But in spite of our many acts of rebellion the free gift of God’s grace makes justification possible to us sinful human beings. The difference between Adam’s one action and that of Christ is enormous! Especially in the impact of both on humanity.

The second defending declaration is verse 17: “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.” The shift of emphasis here is from an action bringing either condemnation or justification to a process of reigning over life. Death reigned as a consequence of Adam’s sin, but to those who receive God’s gift of grace in Christ they are privileged to reign victorious over death in life through the victory won by Jesus Christ. Again the “much more” emphasis stresses the superiority of God’s action in Christ over the power of Adam’s action in sin.

This second section then shifts from the Adam column to the Christ column and stresses the enormous benefit of what we have received in the work of Christ. What a wondrous affirmation of Paul to us!

c. Calvary trumps Eden, vv. 18-21

GNT

5:18 Ἐπειδὴ ὡς δι’ ἑνὸς παραπτώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα, οὕτως καὶ δι’ ἑνὸς δικαιώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς· 5:19 ὥσπερ γὰρ διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἁμαρτωλοὶ κατεστάθησαν οἱ πολλοί, οὕτως καὶ διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς δίκαιου κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί. 5:20 νόμος δὲ παρεῖσθληεν, ἵνα πλεονάσῃ τὸ παράπτωμα· οὐδὲ ἐπλεόνασεν ἡ ἁμαρτία, ὑπερεπερίσσευσεν ἡ χάρις, 5:21 ἵνα ὥσπερ ἐβασίλευσεν ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ, οὕτως καὶ ἡ χάρις βασιλεύσῃ διὰ δικαιοσύνης εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν.

NASB

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. 19 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. 20 The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

NRSV

18 Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. 19 For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. 20 But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

NLT

18 Yes, Adam's one sin brought condemnation upon everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness makes all people right in God's sight and gives them life. 19 Because one person disobeyed God, many people became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many people will be made right in God's sight. 20 God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful kindness became more abundant. 21 So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful kindness rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes:

The connection of these verses to the preceding ones is established through the inferential conjunctions used at the beginning of verse 18: Ἄρα οὖν [ara oun, 'Therefore']. These two Greek words signal a summing up of what has just been said, along with making explicit some implications present in the preceding statements.

The structure of the Greek expression, which is contained in one or possibly two sentences in vv. 18-21, is similar to the previous sections: (1) a core assertion, (2) followed by some defending declarations.

The core assertion is verse 18: "just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all." Again the comparison between the effects of Adam's sin and Christ's death is the point. On the Adam side, Paul makes clear here what he meant in v. 12, "in whom all sinned." Sin slipped into human experience through Adam, and has put all of us in jeopardy. But the one act of dying on the cross by Christ as a righteous deed before God sets up the possibility of justification and life to all those infected by Adam's sin.

Next, in vv. 19-21, follows a defending of this basic point; note the "for" [γάρ] in the translations. Two basic assertions support Paul's declaration in verse 17:

(1) "just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" [v. 19], and

(2) "But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" [vv. 20-21].

The first supporting statement essentially summarizes the core statement, but with the shift of reference from "all" to "the many." Adam's "trespass" [παραπτώματος] is now defined as "disobedience" [παρακοῆς]. Christ's one act of righteousness [δικαιώματος] is now defined as [ὑπακοῆς]. Note the intentional play off similar sounding words: paratomatos > dikaiomatos; parakoes > hypakoes. No English translation can preserve this in translation. Thus Paul eloquently sums up his point in the preceding discussion.

The second support statement introduces an expansion on the role of the Law in this process. In the earlier discussion Paul (vv. 13-14), Paul had alluded to the impact of Adam's sin upon humanity up to the giving of the Law to Moses. Here he addresses in clear terms the implication of the giving of the Law. With coming of the Law, sin multiplied because the Law defined many actions as sinful. The result was to increase the human rebellion against God's will. But once again the superiority of God's grace is stressed. With the increase of sinfulness came the abundance of God's grace to provide victory over the influence of sin. Sin gained victory in the death that condemns, but grace gains victory in justification that brings eternal life. And this comes only through Jesus Christ; not through the Law.

What can we say to these words of Paul? Challenging ideas to be sure! But once understood, they remind us of just how powerful God's grace is in our lives. His expression of grace in the death of Christ brings us out of death, makes us right with God, restores us to friendly relations with God, enables us to escape condemnation and sets us up to anticipate eternal life with the Father.

No wonder John Newton wrote such eloquent lines about God's Amazing Grace.

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.
'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believed!
When we've been ther ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less day to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

Block Diagram

12

Διὰ τοῦτο

δι' ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου
εἰς τὸν κόσμον

ὡσπερ... ἡ ἁμαρτία... εἰσῆλθεν
καὶ

διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας

ὁ θάνατος...

καὶ οὕτως
εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους

1

ὁ θάνατος διήλθεν,

ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον.

13

γάρ

ἄχρι νόμου

2

ἁμαρτία ἦν

ἐν κόσμῳ,

δὲ

3

ἁμαρτία οὐκ ἐλλογεῖται

μὴ ὄντος νόμου,

14

ἀλλὰ

4

ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ θάνατος

ἀπὸ Ἀδάμ
μέχρι Μωϋσέως

καὶ

ἐπὶ τοὺς μὴ ἁμαρτήσαντας
ἐπὶ τῷ ὁμοιώματι

τῆς παραβάσεως Ἀδάμ

ὅς ἐστιν τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος.

15

Ἄλλ'

οὐχ ὡς τὸ παράπτωμα (ἐστίν),
οὕτως

καὶ

5

τὸ χάρισμα (ἐστίν).

γάρ

τῷ τοῦ ἑνὸς παραπτώματι

εἰ... οἱ πολλοὶ ἀπέθανον,
πολλῶ μᾶλλον

6

ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ (ἐπερίσσευσεν)

καὶ

ἐν χάριτι τῇ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
εἰς τοὺς πολλοὺς

7

ἡ δωρεὰ... ἐπερίσσευσεν.

16

καὶ

8

τὸ δῶρημα (ἐστίν).

γάρ

οὐχ ὡς δι' ἑνὸς ἁμαρτήσαντος

9

τὸ... κρίμα (ἐστίν)

μὲν

ἐξ ἑνὸς
εἰς κατάκριμα,

10

τὸ χάρισμα (ἐστίν)

ἐκ πολλῶν παραπτωμάτων

17 εἰς δικαίωμα.
γάρ
τῷ τοῦ ἐνὸς παραπτώματί
εἰ...θάνατος ἐβασίλευσεν
διὰ τοῦ ἐνὸς,
πολλῶ μᾶλλον
τὴν περισσεῖαν...λαμβάνοντες
τῆς χάριτος
καὶ
τῆς δωρεᾶς
τῆς δικαιοσύνης
ἐν ζωῇ

11 **οἱ...βασιλεύουσιν**
διὰ τοῦ ἐνὸς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

18 Ἄρα
οὖν
ὡς (αὐτό ἐστίν)
δι' ἐνὸς παραπτώματος
εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους
εἰς κατάκριμα,
οὕτως καὶ
12 **(αὐτό ἐστίν)**
δι' ἐνὸς δικαίωματος
εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους
εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς·

19 γάρ
διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου
ὥσπερ...ἀμαρτωλοὶ κατεστάθησαν οἱ πολλοί,
οὕτως καὶ
13 **δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί.**
διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἐνὸς

20 δὲ
14 **νόμος παρεῖσθην,**
ἵνα πλεονάσῃ τὸ παράπτωμα·
δὲ
οὐ ἐπλεόνασεν ἡ ἁμαρτία,
15 **ὑπερεπέρισεν ἡ χάρις,**
ὥσπερ ἐβασίλευσεν ἡ ἁμαρτία
21 ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ,
οὕτως
καὶ
ἵνα...ἡ χάρις βασιλεύσῃ
διὰ δικαιοσύνης
εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον
διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν.

Semantic Diagram

vv. 12-14

							Διὰ τοῦτο						
	A.	-----	1	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3 S	ὁ θάνατος					a
							γάρ						
I.	---	a) -----	2	Impf		Ind	3 S	ἁμαρτία					b
		1. ---					δε						
	B.	----- b) -----	3	Pres	Dep	Ind	3 S	ἁμαρτία					b'
							ὁλλά						
		2. -----	4	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3 S	ὁ θάνατος					a'

vv. 15-17

							Ἄλλ'						
		1. -----	5	(Pres)		Ind	3 S	τὸ χάρισμα					a
	A.	-----					γάρ						
		a) -----	6	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3 S	ἡ χάρις					b
		2. ---					καὶ						
II.	---	b) -----	7	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3 S	ἡ δωρεὰ					c
							καὶ						
		1. -----	8	(Pres)		Ind	3 S	τὸ δῶρημα					c'
							γάρ						
	B.	-----	9	(Pres)		Ind	3 S	τὸ...κρίμα					b'
		a) ---					μὲν...δὲ						
			10	(Pres)		Ind	3 S	τὸ χάρισμα					a'
		2. ---					γάρ						
		b) -----	11	Pres	Act	Ind	3 P	οἱ...λαμβάνοντες					

vv. 18-21

							Ἄρα οὖν						
	A.	-----	12	(Pres)		Ind	3 S	αὐτό)					
							γάρ						
III.	---	1. -----	13	Fut	Pass	Ind	3 P	οἱ πολλοί.					
							δε						
	B.	----- a) -----	14	2 Aor	Act	Ind	3 S	νόμος					
		2. ---					δε						
		b) -----	15	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3 S	ἡ χάρις					