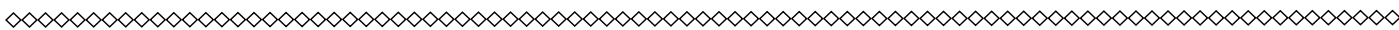




Pastor of the  
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many.

**Sermon Brief**  
**Text: Rom. 5:12-21**  
**Title: Sin is . . .**  
Lorin L. Cranford

Seeking to faith-  
fully proclaim  
the whole coun-  
cil of God in  
scripture!



**INTRODUCTION**

What is sin? A basic question to be certain, but one that few people, even among believers, have clear understanding of in our time. For the next two Sundays we are going to take a closer look at this spiritual reality that dominates our world and holds millions upon millions of people in total captivity.

The Bible has different terms for sin.<sup>1</sup> In the Old Testament, sin is often defined by the Law of God as rebellion against that divine Law. Paul will make an important point here in our text from Romans 5, however. But more profoundly sin becomes perverseness and repugnancy before God and brings down His wrath. In the New Testament a wide variety of Greek terms refer to sin. But two dominate the discussion: 1) *hamartia* [ἁμαρτία] and 2) *paraptoma* [παράπτωμα]. And these are two of the three terms, which Paul uses in our text.

Let's take a look at what Paul has to say about sin in Romans 5:12-21:<sup>2</sup>

12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all, [in the one man Adam]<sup>3</sup> all have sinned. 13 [Now] 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. 15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, 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

<sup>1</sup>"The Biblical Terminology of Sin. The vast terminology, within its biblical contexts, suggests that sin has three aspects: disobedience to or breach of law, violation of relationships with people, and rebellion against God, which is the most basic concept. Risking oversimplification, among the most common Hebrew terms, *hattat* [חַטָּאת] means a missing of a standard, mark, or goal; *pesa* [פְּשָׁע] means the breach of a relationship or rebellion; *awon* [עוֹן] means perverseness; *segagah* [שְׁגָגָה] signifies error or mistake; *resa* [רֵשָׁע] means godlessness, injustice, and wickedness; and *amal* [עֲמָל] when it refers to sin, means mischief or oppression. The most common Greek term is *hamartia* [ἁμαρτία], a word often personified in the New Testament, and signifying offenses against laws, people, or God. *Paraptoma* [παράπτωμα] is another general term for offenses or lapses. *Adikia* [ἀδικία] is a more narrow and legal word, describing unrighteousness and unjust deeds. *Parabasis* [παράβασις] signifies trespass or transgression of law; *asebeia* [ἀσέβεια] means godlessness or impiety; and *anomia* [ἀνομία] means lawlessness. The Bible typically describes sin negatively. It is lawlessness, disobedience, impiety, unbelief, distrust, darkness as opposed to light, a falling away as opposed to standing firm, weakness not strength. It is unrighteousness, faithlessness." [Source: Daniel Doriani, "Sin," *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*]

<sup>2</sup>5·12 Διὰ τοῦτο ὡς περ δι' ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος, καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διῆλθεν, ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον· 5·13 ἄχρι γὰρ νόμου ἁμαρτία ἦν ἐν κόσμῳ, ἁμαρτία δὲ οὐκ ἔλλογεῖται μὴ ὄντος νόμου, 5·14 ἀλλὰ ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ θάνατος ἀπὸ Ἀδὰμ μέχρι Μωϋσέως καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς μὴ ἁμαρτήσαντας ἐπὶ τῷ ὁμοιώματι τῆς παραβάσεως Ἀδὰμ ὅς ἐστιν τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος.

5·15 Ἄλλ' οὐχ ὡς τὸ παράπτωμα, οὕτως καὶ τὸ χάρισμα· εἰ γὰρ τῷ τοῦ ἑνὸς παραπτώματι οἱ πολλοὶ ἀπέθανον, πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ δωρεὰ ἐν χάριτι τῆ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐπερίσσευσεν. 5·16 καὶ οὐχ ὡς δι' ἑνὸς ἁμαρτήσαντος τὸ δῶρημα· τὸ μὲν γὰρ κρίμα ἐξ ἑνὸς εἰς κατάκριμα, τὸ δὲ χάρισμα ἐκ πολλῶν παραπτωμάτων εἰς δικαίωμα. 5·17 εἰ γὰρ τῷ τοῦ ἑνὸς παραπτώματι ὁ θάνατος ἐβασίλευσεν διὰ τοῦ ἑνός, πολλῶ μᾶλλον οἱ τὴν περισσεῖαν τῆς χάριτος καὶ τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς δικαιοσύνης λαμβάνοντες ἐν ζωῇ βασιλεύουσιν διὰ τοῦ ἑνός Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

5·18 Ἄρα οὖν ὡς δι' ἑνὸς παραπτώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα, οὕτως καὶ δι' ἑνός δικαιοσύνης εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς· 5·19 ὡς περ γὰρ διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἑνός ἀνθρώπου ἁμαρτωλοὶ κατεστάθησαν οἱ πολλοί, οὕτως καὶ διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἑνός δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί. 5·20 νόμος δὲ παρεῖσθη, ἵνα πλεονάσῃ τὸ παράπτωμα· οὐδὲ ἐπλεόνασεν ἡ ἁμαρτία, ὑπερπερίσσευσεν ἡ χάρις, 5·21 ἵνα ὡς περ ἐβασίλευσεν ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ, οὕτως καὶ ἡ χάρις βασιλεύσῃ διὰ δικαιοσύνης εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν.

<sup>3</sup>In this part of the NRSV translation, I deeply disagree with the accuracy of the translation, and thus have modified the translation in order to bring it in line with the reading of the Greek text.

righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. 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.

Paul's discussion here provokes a lot of discussion in scholarly circles today, as well as in the past. Western cultural tendencies, particularly western individualism, have given rise to many of these discussions as well as false applications made out of the early Christian understanding of this text. The entire Roman Catholic system of infant baptism to cover 'original sin' is the primary mistake in extending the ideas of Paul here in a false direction. This reaches back to the church father Augustine in the fourth century who set this false understanding in motion. Not until the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s was this corrected by Protestants, and then often times the correction was based on an equally false understanding of Paul's words. This alternative view of Paul's words is quite popular among Evangelical Christians in today's world. The tendency to favor this perspective comes mainly from modern Western cultural traits, primarily individualism. But the problem is that one mistake has been 'corrected' by another mistake, and thus both perspectives miss the point made by the apostle Paul. We will try to point the way to Paul's own meaning and its significance for us today.

What does Paul say about sin in Rom. 5:12-21? Three key points emerge from these verses regarding sin. 1) Death reigns in human existence through sin; but 2) God's gift of grace reigns more powerfully. And finally, 3) Calvary triumphs over Eden.

The Greek text of Romans is very complex but becomes understandable with the right kind of analysis of the grammar and syntax. So listen closely; I'll try not to overwhelm you with technical matters. If you want to probe the text in greater detail, then go to the internet background Bible study on this text at cranfordville.com. Here I will only summarize and simplify that discussion.

## **BODY**

### **I. Death reigns through Adam's sin, vv. 12-14**

"12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all, [in the one man Adam]<sup>4</sup> all have sinned. 13 [Now] 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."

5·12 Διὰ τοῦτο ὡσπερ δι' ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἀμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος, καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διήλθεν, ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον· 5·13 ἄχρι γὰρ νόμου ἀμαρτία ἦν ἐν κόσμῳ, ἀμαρτία δὲ οὐκ ἐλλογεῖται μὴ ὄντος νόμου, 5·14 ἀλλὰ ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ θάνατος ἀπὸ Ἀδάμ μέχρι Μωϋσέως καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς μὴ ἀμαρτήσαντας ἐπὶ τῷ ὁμοιώματι τῆς παραβάσεως Ἀδάμ ὅς ἐστιν τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος.

In the biblical text we are looking at a single sentence with these verses. Two core ideas are presented by Paul and then expanded on and defended. First, "death came through sin." And second, "death spread to all." Everything else expands on these two foundational ideas.

What is Paul saying here? We must not forget that he is writing to Christians in Rome, many of whom had a Jewish background and understood such concepts within the boundaries of their Jewish religious heritage. Paul will take advantage of this background and thus affirms part of it but denies a lot of it as having validity. Our understanding of Paul's words then must come out of this context.

We need to understand his idea of 'death.' His choice of words in the Greek is quite deliberate because ὁ θάνατος, which he uses here, is a basic, all inclusive word for death. In fact, he uses this word some 58 times in his letters. Death then includes physical dying, spiritual death, lifelessness in any form. His point here is that the reality of death in all its expressions gained entrance into our world through sin. Death was not a part of God's original design in creation. Death was not built into the Garden of Eden, even though that's where it gained entrance into our world.

One individual is responsible for the intrusion of 'death' into the world: Adam. Had Adam not ever sinned, death would not have entered the created world. Ah! And how did Adam bring death into our world? The answer: sin! Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden and opened the door for death to enter the world. And what did Adam do that Paul terms 'sin'? In verse twelve Adam's action is called ἡ ἀμαρτία. Now *harmatia* is failure. Failure to live up to expectations. Failure to do what is expected. Failure to be what God wants us to be.

In verse fourteen, Adam's sin is also labeled ἡ παράβασις. Literally, Adam 'went over the boundary' that

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<sup>4</sup>In this part of the NRSV translation, I deeply disagree with the accuracy of the translation, and thus have modified the translation in order to bring it in line with the reading of the Greek text.

God had set. God had said to not eat the forbidden fruit, but Adam stepped over that boundary and ate. Thus he disobeyed God. In verse fifteen, Adam's sin is designated as τὸ παράπτωμα. *Paraptoma* is similar to *parabasis* with the slightly different angle to 'stepping' over the boundary, rather than 'going' over the boundary. A little more intentionality may very well be in the different words. Adam's action to eat was an act of deliberate rebellion against God. But, ultimately more importantly, this rebellion opened the door for a spiritual dynamic called *harmatia* to set up shop on planet earth and to begin causing havoc. Sin is what we do, but it is oh so much more than that! It is a powerful force that permeates all of life and causes people to fail God and to exist in a state of rebellion against God.

Once sin found entrance in this world, it began causing its devastation, which Paul labels as death. Sin kills everything it touches! That's the plain truth of the matter. You can dress it up, and make it look attractive. But touch it, and you're dead. You can't change its fundamental nature and character.

And sin spreads. Paul makes that abundantly clear. It passed from Adam to 'all men.' (v. 12). Our sinfulness today has its beginnings in Adam. In him we gained our sinful nature and stand condemned along with him as sinners. Our own sinful actions only compound that problem and make it worse. But if we never committed a single sinful act -- which is of course impossible -- we would still be sinners before God. We're infected with the disease of sin by virtue of our kinship to Adam.

Sin rules supremely in the world. And has from Adam on. It did not need to wait until the giving of the Law of Moses on Mt. Sinai before it could exert destructive influence on humanity. Here was where some Jewish scribes in Paul's day misunderstood sin. Sin was mere action and had to be defined as such by the Torah before it could exist -- so they thought. But Paul knew better than this. Sin had its beginning in the Garden of Eden, long before the Law came along. And it was just as deadly a force then, as it was after Moses.

What does all this mean to us today? People, sin hasn't changed its nature since the Garden of Eden. It's just as deadly today as it was back then. Sin is not mere action. To be sure, it is an act of rebellion against God and it represents serious failure to live up to God's expectation. But sin exists outside our actions. It is a spiritual force powerfully present in our world and it permeates every human being with its deadly impact. No matter how hard you try to escape it, or to deny it, you're already trapped by it, my friend. It has you in its deadly grip and you can not escape it no matter how hard you try.

## II. God's gift of grace through Christ reigns more powerfully, vv. 15-17

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

5:15 Ἄλλ' οὐχ ὡς τὸ παράπτωμα, οὕτως καὶ τὸ χάρισμα· εἰ γὰρ τῷ τοῦ ἑνὸς παραπτώματι οἱ πολλοὶ ἀπέθανον, πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἢ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ δωρεὰ ἐν χάριτι τῇ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐπερίσσευσεν. 5:16 καὶ οὐχ ὡς δι' ἑνὸς ἀμαρτήσαντος τὸ δώρημα· τὸ μὲν γὰρ κρίμα ἐξ ἑνὸς εἰς κατάκριμα, τὸ δὲ χάρισμα ἐκ πολλῶν παραπτωμάτων εἰς δικαίωμα. 5:17 εἰ γὰρ τῷ τοῦ ἑνὸς παραπτώματι ὁ θάνατος ἐβασίλευσεν διὰ τοῦ ἑνός, πολλῶ μᾶλλον οἱ τὴν περισσεῖαν τῆς χάριτος καὶ τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς δικαιοσύνης λαμβάνοντες ἐν ζωῇ βασιλεύουσιν διὰ τοῦ ἑνός Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

From the problem of sin Paul turns to the only possible solution to sin in vv. 15-17.

In a series of comparisons between sin and 'gift' Paul contrasts the two spiritual realities now existing since Jesus. The sin problem in human existence has no solution outside of God. Individuals are powerless to solve it. Sin as a spiritual power is enormously stronger than any human being. The collective might of human kind in general has no ability to break free from the strangle hold that sin has over creation and over their lives.

But God at Calvary provided the only possible solution! Paul characterizes this work of God as 'gift.' Three separate words are used here for 'gift': 1) τὸ χάρισμα, 2) τὸ δώρημα, and 3) ἡ δωρεὰ. The NRSV (above) translates all three Greek words as 'free gift.' Actually, this is not a bad translation, but our English language limits our ability to grasp the fuller import of Paul's words. Before probing the background of the words themselves, let us note how Paul qualifies both words.

*Verse 15: the χάρισμα is not like the trespass of Adam; the ἡ δωρεὰ abounded in the grace of Christ to human kind.*

Thus the 'gift' has a different character and nature than the sin (παράπτωμα) of Adam. Adam deliberately disobeyed God. But the gift represents the opposite: steadfast obedience to the Father's will to the point of personal sacrifice in death. And gift comes as an express of grace (ἡ χάρις). What we receive from Christ reflects the mercy and compassion of Almighty God. Thus a fundamentally different character exists between

the two.

*Verse 16: the δῶρημα is not like the impact of one man's sin; the χάρισμα brings justification to human kind.*

The second set of comparisons stresses the impact of the two actions of Adam and Christ. When Adam sinned, he unleashed the deadly disease of sin that brought death to all human kind. And ultimately this death means condemnation in Hell. In contrast, however, when Christ died, he brought justification (δικαίωμα). That is, death producing sin brings eternal separation from God. But the gift in Christ brings eternal fellowship with God in that this action of Christ becomes the foundation of our being made right, or acceptable, to God for all eternity. Thus the impact of the two actions are opposite one another. Adam brought alienation from God; Christ brings justification and acceptance before God.

*Verse 17: the abundance of the δωρεὰ reigns supremely.*

An important part of the contrast is the abundance of the presence of the gift. The key verb here is 'reign' (ἐβασίλευσεν/ βασιλεύουσιν). Through Adam's sin, death (ὁ θάνατος) did reign. But now those who have received God's grace and gift (οἱ τὴν περισσείαν τῆς χάριτος καὶ τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς δικαιοσύνης λαμβάνοντες) reign supremely. And they are reigning 'in life' (ἐν ζωῇ). Through the one person Jesus Christ they have experienced 'resurrection' life, that is, they have been brought out from under death and into life with God. And thus death has no more grip on them. They reign over death, rather than death reigning over them.

The central concept of what Christ has done is thus 'gift.' All three Greek words for gift stress the common point that this is something given to us, and not something we earn or deserve. Life both now and in eternity comes as gift, and in particular as gift of God's grace. He favors us with this blessing. The first word χάρισμα stresses the divine favor in gift; note the similar root source between this χάρισμα and grace (χάρις). The second (δωρεά) and third (δῶρημα) words come from a common root with emphasis on either the content of what is freely given (δωρεά) or the act of freely giving (δῶρημα).

Thus with powerful rhetoric Paul asserts the superiority of God's grace in Jesus Christ over the tragic impact of Adam's sin.

My dear friend, if you're present today and you have never experienced this grace of God as gift in your life, let me urge you to consider coming to Christ today. You have a sin problem. No question or doubt about that -- whether you realize it or not. You were born spiritually dead in sin at birth. You have never ever experienced spiritual life one instant of your existence on planet earth. Right this moment you're a walking corpse spiritually. You have a serious problem!

And you can't solve it by yourself. There's absolutely nothing that you can do to escape the tyranny that sin and death have over your life this very moment. Try as hard as you might to reform your living, to clean up your life, none of it will do a lick of good in delivering you from the bondage of sin and death. Even though you might become a good, noble person by determined self-effort, you will remain a dirty sinner at the core of your being. And thus under condemnation. Hell is your fate in eternity!

But the wonderfully good news of the Gospel is that in Christ you can be delivered from this awesome curse of sin and death. The one act of Christ dying on the cross unleashed a spiritual power far, far superior to the power of sin and death. In God's grace that spiritual power is available to you today. It can't be bought! You can't earn it! God offers it to you as gift -- free gift. You must receive it as gift in faith commitment to Christ. I plead with you, accept this gift today. Don't walk away from the best gift you're ever receive. A multi-million Euro lottery jackpot is nothing in comparison to what God offers you today in Christ.

### III. Calvary triumphs over Eden, vv. 18-21

*"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."*

5:18 Ἄρα οὖν ὡς δι' ἑνὸς παραπτώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα, οὕτως καὶ δι' ἑνὸς δικαιοσύνης 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 δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί. 5:20 νόμος δὲ παρεισηλθεν, ἵνα πλεονάσῃ τὸ παράπτωμα· οὐ δὲ ἐπλέονασεν 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.

Finally, Paul sums up his central point: *so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.* Paul puts everything into sharp focus in this third segment with just two sentences in the biblical text. The one righteous act of Jesus Christ makes righteousness possible for all who will accept Christ. The operative words here are justification / justify / just (δικαίωμα / δικαιοῶ / δίκαιοι ) and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη). Note

that all these words originate from a common root source, even though English translation obscures this by using entirely different words in translation. Rightness with acceptability is at the heart of these words. Jesus' action of dying was right and thus acceptable to God. The impact of the force of that action upon our lives is to make us right before God and thus acceptable to a holy God.

And this justifying power of Calvary reigns supremely not just in this life, but extends into the ceaseless ages of eternity. The life that Calvary produces is not temporary or uncertain. To the contrast, it is eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον) and is not subject to the power of death whatsoever.

What God has accomplished in the death of Christ is amazing. He has solved our problem for us. We stand helpless and enslaved to sin. But God in His grace through Christ has broken that power and given us life -- life abundant and life eternal -- and we will live with God in acceptance for all eternity.

### **CONCLUSION**

Thus I come back to the beginning issue. You and I have a sin problem. We can't do anything about it within our own strength. We inherited this problem from Adam and have made it worse by our own actions. We're trapped and enslaved by sin and death. But praise be to God, we don't even need to try to liberate ourselves. God has provided the solution in His Son Jesus Christ. All that we must do is to receive this liberating grace of God as gift. Not earned; not deserved! Just as gift, freely offered by the God of this universe to all who receive His Son as Lord and Savior.

Will you come to Jesus today? Don't turn away from your one and only hope for life both now and in eternity!