

“ABOUNDING LOVE.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

November 19, 2023, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Romans 5:18-21

Introduction.

This morning we turn to the final verses of Romans 5. After today I am going to push the pause button and take a break from Romans for a while. As has been my practice for all my years of preaching, I will do a series of sermons for Advent.

Then as has also been my practice I will do a series of topical sermons for the new year. That will lead us up to Lent for which I am pondering a couple of ideas. So, Lord willing we will resume Romans after Easter which is early next year, March 31.

Our text this morning is a summary kind of passage in which Paul resumes and then concludes a thought he started in verse 12, but then interrupted himself with a digression which led to some other thoughts.

Paul repeats himself here in vss. 18-19. He started this point in vs. 12, with a therefore, and he comes back to the same point here again in vs. 18 with another therefore.

I have said before that the way God emphasizes things in His Scripture is with repetition. We use bold, italics, underline, all caps, God uses repetition. His book isn't that big, so if He uses up space to repeat something, it must be worthy of extra attention.

The Summary, vs. 18.

Romans 5:18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

One sentence filled with so much truth and revelation about God and us and our world. One verse that explains why our world is the way it is and why you and I are the way we are.

Adam was given one command by God, and Adam broke that one command, and by that one sin, sin and death entered into the world and spread to all of mankind.

Adam's sin was the original sin, the origin of all sin. From Adam's sin comes everything Paul described in Romans 1, idolatry, the lusts of the heart, impurity, dishonorable passions, shameless acts and

Romans 1:29-31 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Sin impacts every facet and every corner of nature, economics, society, law, politics, science, education, business, church and family life.

Sin is why the headlines are filled with war, violence, destruction, corruption, hate and death.

Sin is why we need democracy where power is spread out, shared and has levels of accountability, because power in the hands of a few will corrupt and lead to corruption.

Sin is why our children are the way they are, why they disobey, say no, and I want. When you discipline your children, teach them why they do it, help them understand their inherited nature and tell them you are a sinner also and point them to their only hope to stop, the Gospel, grace, forgiveness and the Holy Spirit.

Adam's sin infected and corrupted all of creation. It is all subjected to futility and groaning in the bondage of decay. There is nowhere in all of creation you can go to be free from the effects of Adam's sin.

We are sinners by nature and we sin by choice. All I have to do is ask you how did you do this week? Did you sin? Were you tempted and did you sin? How did you do this morning? Any sin? How about right now? How have you done worshiping God? Has your mind wandered? Any pride, greed, lust, impatience, selfish thoughts?

By one man's sin, so we all sin. But by one man's righteousness, comes justification with God and life for all men.

Christ comes as the second Adam, the last Adam, to restore what Adam destroyed. Notice the parallel, one sin plunged the world into sin and death, one act of righteousness rescues and redeems and restores.

How many acts of righteousness? One. How much do we need to do to add to this righteousness in order to be saved? What must we add to make sure we are saved?

In the Roman Catholic Church there is a doctrine called Purgatory. It's a place a Christian's soul goes to after death to be cleansed of the sins that had not been fully satisfied during life. Purgatory is a place they say you go because you haven't done well enough in this life in order to get into heaven. It is a place of further suffering to expiate your remaining sin before going to heaven.

This is why Catholics will light candles, do Masses for the dead, pray for the dead, do other works or merits to help dead relatives get out of purgatory more quickly.

They don't recognize the sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice, that we are already cleansed, declared righteous, forgiven, redeemed, reconciled, and made right with the Father. If we must, in order to be saved, pay for, atone for, or suffer more because of our sins, then Jesus' death was not a perfect, complete sacrifice.

But lest we be too hard on the Catholics, we Protestants are no better. It is part of our human nature and our own pride to try to make a contribution to our salvation, to work our way or earn our way into God's good graces. We all try to add to the righteousness of Christ, by trying harder to be better and do better.

Paul has been over this ground again and again. No works, no law, no circumcision or uncircumcision, nothing in us and nothing we can do can overcome or pay for our unrighteousness. We must receive an alien righteousness, a righteousness outside of ourselves and it can only be received by grace through faith.

Jesus's one act of righteousness is more than sufficient to save every person from every sin.

5:18-19, all men and the many.

There is one more doctrine in this verse that needs our attention. Is Paul saying that by one man's righteousness all men will receive life and be saved. Isn't that the parallel to by one man all are condemned to die, so by one man all are saved to live for eternity?

Does this passage support *universalism*, the popular belief that all mankind will be saved and enter into heaven? What do "all men" and "the many" mean?

We don't have to give a lot of attention to this lie of universalism. We spent much of Romans 4 talking about how Abraham was justified by faith and that the promises rest on grace received through faith. It is faith that is counted to us as righteousness.

Who are the all and the many? When referring to Adam, it includes all mankind, all who are in Adam and descended from Adam.

When referring to the second Adam, Christ, the all and the many also refer to all those who are in Christ. But those who are in Christ are in Christ not by birth, as with the first Adam, but those who are in Christ by faith, by believing in Jesus, they are those who are recipients of grace.

Romans 5:17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those *who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness* reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

We are descendants of Adam by the flesh, we are descendants of Christ by the Spirit.

The effects of one act of sin are credited or imputed to the account of all who are in Adam by birth. The benefits of one act of righteousness are credited or imputed to the account of all those who are in Christ by faith.

Explanation of summary, vs. 19.

Romans 5:19 For 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.

Paul explains what Adam's one trespass is and what Christ's one act of righteousness is.

The one trespass is disobedience to God and Christ's one act of righteousness is obedience to God. Adam grasped at equality with God, Jesus did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped.

What is that one act of righteousness in Christ? His obedience. Which obedience? His entire life and ministry are one great act of obedience, His coming to earth, His obedience in life, and His obedience in death, all His perfect obedience to do the will of the Father.

One single act of disobedience would have completely disqualified Christ from being our righteousness.

From this we learn if we wish to justify ourselves before a holy God, we must perfectly obey the Law of God. If we want to be justified in the presence of God by our works, they must be as perfect as Christ's. We can't be partially obedient, or mostly obedient or better than most everyone else. One trespass, one disobedience renders us dead.

And what hope is there for anyone of keeping the Law perfectly? Paul addresses that in the next verse.

The purpose of the Law, vs. 20.

What is the purpose of the Law of God given to Moses on Mt. Sinai? One of the purposes is that it increases the trespass.

You might say one reason God gave the Law was to stir up trouble, to make everyone realize they were worse than they knew or thought. The Law made our sin increase. How does the Law make sin increase?

Suppose you are up on Sumas Mountain to go four-wheeling or hiking or hunting. Your conscience tells you, you are on someone's property, but you don't pay much attention to it. Then the next time you go up there are several big "No Trespassing" signs posted on the property. Now what do you do? You decide to go in anyway. The law increases our trespass.

Paul says this in Romans 7

Romans 7:7 If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

Before the Law was given teenagers who disobeyed their parents may have had some sting of conscience that what they were doing was wrong. But when the Law came that said "Honor your father and mother" now the disobedience is a clear violation of God's commandment and the sin increases.

Romans 3:20 Through the law comes knowledge of sin.

The Law was like a poison warning label on a bottle. It makes clear the danger and the result.

Paul is saying the law is a mirror showing us how great our sinfulness is. The Law caused sin to abound in order that grace may abound even more. In order to see how great is the grace of God we must first see how great is our sin. If you have little knowledge of how great your sin is, you have little love for God. He who is forgiven much, loves much.

The Law made sin to increase, so that grace would be seen to abound even more. As one Puritan put it, "There is more grace in Jesus than there is sin in me" or in the whole world.

How big is the difference? How big a difference will the last Adam's work be compared to the first Adam's work? 20% bigger, 50% better? Not even close.

All sin will be swallowed up in an ocean of infinite grace, mercy and steadfast love. If you could take all the human sin and wickedness and rebellion and put it in a gallon bucket, what God will do would more than fill the Pacific Ocean.

The Conclusion: The Reign of Grace, vs. 21.

Romans 5:21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sin shows its power in death. Grace shows its power in life. By one act of divine kindness, mercy grace comes, and the reign of sin and death is over.

Implications and application.

As we take a break from Romans for a few months, I ask you to reflect on a few things we have learned from Paul's letter to the Christians in the church in Rome.

First, be sobered by the power of sin in your life, and the devastating power of just one sin in your life. It is the cause of your approaching death. Be killing sin before it kills you.

Second, be sobered by the effect of sin and how one sin can affect many people. It doesn't just affect you, it affects your family, your friends, your classmates and co-workers.

Third, don't think you are better than others, think no worse of anyone else than you do of yourself. All our hearts are deceitful and full of all manner of evil. Consider how much grace and mercy you have received and have compassion for others in their sin.

It is very hard to treat other sinners with contempt and lovelessness when we have a deep grasp of our own fallen condition.

Fourth, learn from Christ the importance and beauty of obedience. Make obedience the fruit of a heart made glad by grace. Don't respond to God just from fear or duty, but motivated by love for so great a grace from so great a Savior. Put to death the sin of the flesh, no longer live as Adam, but live by the Spirit by faith in Christ.

Fifth, glory in the greatness of the superabundant grace of God given to overcome the greatest sin and give salvation to the greatest sinners. It is cause for worship, joy, and thanksgiving.

Prayer: Holy Father, may every person here know how much greater your grace is than all their sin. May they know in deeper ways your super-abounding grace, grace greater than all our sin. Enable us all to reign with Christ in His righteousness now and forever. Amen.