



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The Grace Divide

August 25, 2019

Romans 5:15-21

Clint Pressley

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. 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.

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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. ²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Pastor prays)

If you get in your car and ride just 2 1/2 hours in a northwesterly direction, you will soon see the topography change from the Piedmont into gently rolling foothills. You keep going and finally find yourself winding through the Appalachian Mountains. And if you know the way, you can get to a place called Grandfather Mountain with the world-famous Mile High swinging bridge. It's said that on the top of Grandfather Mountain, on a clear day, you can see all the way to Charlotte.

But that mountain is important for a lesser-known geological reason. Grandfather Mountain is the highest point on what is known as the Eastern Continental Divide. Everything on the eastern side of the Eastern Continental Divide comes up from the Atlantic Ocean and everything on the

western side of the continental divide flows down to the Gulf of Mexico. So that in a real way, everything either goes up to Grandfather Mountain or flows down from it.

Some have said that Chapter 5 is the continental divide of Romans. All things lead *up* to this passage and everything flows *down* from it. And if it is the continental divide of Romans, Paul has placed two men on the ridge to look at: Adam and Christ. If you know these two men, you will have a hold on the central message of the Bible.

Now to the passage we are looking at this morning. It is tightly packed and must be carefully unraveled. Verse 14 ends with the strange statement that Adam is a “type” of Christ. But Paul is going to hold the two men up and show us that this type is less of a foreshadowing but more of a contrast in hope. Adam and Christ are the two most influential individuals in human history. We are born in Adam, and we are redeemed in Christ. Our connection to Adam is natural. Our hope in Christ is supernatural. In Adam we are born into flesh; in Christ we are born in the spirit. This passage shows us that change and how we can actually know if we are in Adam or are in Jesus Christ. Adam did his descendants a terrible wrong and Christ gave His people an abundant life-changing gift.

God's Grace in Christ is our Only Solution

We are naturally in trouble

Verse 15 starts with the word “but.” But the free gift is not like the trespass. “But” is a strong adversative up against verse 14 to keep us from thinking that Adam is like Christ. The free gift of Jesus is not like the trespass of Adam. God's act of grace in Jesus is way out of proportion to the offense of Adam's sin.

Let's look at Adam's sin and then God's answer.

In verse 15, many die through one man's trespass. Is he talking about physical and spiritual death? Physical death is the consequence of spiritual death. There is something prior to our individual sins, something that fosters and explains and motivates our sin. We didn't enter into the world in a neutral state like Adam did. We didn't. But the effect of Adam's sin was a disaster. It meant death for everyone, and our problem is the connection we have with Adam's sin.

This passage is an ugly picture of that and a reminder of why we so desperately need the soothing forgiveness found at the cross of Jesus. This sort of blows up my outline but I want to show you the depth of our problem. This is going to explain a lot. We don't always have answers but sometimes it just helps to know why people act like they do. Why we act like we do. Look with me at the depth of the problem. Let me just go through the verses and point it out.

Verse 15 says many died through one man's trespass. Trespass, that is a deviation from a path or a normal road. It means to go where you shouldn't go. Adam's *one* sin brought on consequences in verse 16b, judgment and condemnation. God hates sin so much that it took only *one* sin to condemn the whole race. And it's not just death. The word is *condemnation*, it's the opposite of *justification*. (We will get to that.) It's a judicial sentence. If death is the consequences of sin, then condemnation is the sentence pronounced out loud.

Adam's sin has caused great devastation in the world and everybody knows that cleaning up a mess is much harder than making one. The one sin of Adam unleashed a torrent of sin in the world. We live on a river of sin, and that river finds its source in that one act in the Garden.

Verse 17 tells us the problem gets worse. Because of one man's trespass, death reigned. See that word "reigned." Through sin death gained its sovereignty. In essence we are slaves of death. We dread it. We put it off. We pray it leaves us alone. We want more time, but it's supreme. No one escapes death's rule. It's the sword of Damocles hanging over our head every moment. And furthermore, he's not saying death rules over us because we all sin; he's saying death reigns over us because *Adam* sinned.

It has been said that the world is a place of cemeteries; death reigns. Don't you remember? That's not the way it's supposed to be. Remember what God said to the man and woman in Genesis 1:28. Moses wrote it like this. ²⁸ *And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

To take dominion over the earth means to organize, fix and keep it. Adam was supposed to rule the world for God, but instead, because of his sin, death rules over all people. Verse 18 says one trespass led to the condemnation for all men. Verse 19 says that by one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners. That last terrible phrase in verse 19, "many were made sinners,"

doesn't mean that sinless people were compelled to become sinners but rather that because of Adam's sin we are born as a race of people already separated from God. And we are naturally, by nature, in trouble. Here is why the cross of Jesus is necessary and how that applies to us. If we are naturally in trouble ...

We are supernaturally saved

We've looked at who we are in *Adam*. Let's go back now and deal with who we *can* be in *Christ*.

In verse 15, Paul marvels at the grace of God in Christ. Adam wreaked havoc, Christ brings glory. What Christ reverses at the cross surpasses what Adam lost in the Garden. Look at the words in verse 15. Free gift. Grace. Free gift. Abounded. Verse 16 says again "free gift, free gift, justification." Verse 17 says, the "abundance of grace, free gift, reign in life through Jesus Christ."

So let's take all of those words and phrases about what Christ has done for us on the cross and think about how that heals us and forgives us.

Sometimes we describe grace as undeserved favor. What happened at the cross is so much more than undeserved favor. The power of what Christ has done reverses the consequences of Adam's sin. The effects of Adam's sin were disastrous. It was death for everyone, but the work of Christ is introduced with the phrase "much more." It is far greater than anything it can be compared to. In fact, at the end of verse 15, Paul says grace abounded. ¹⁵ *But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.* Verse 20 says grace "super abounded." There was plenty of sin but so much more grace. You can't measure grace or work it out in fairness. It's abounding, generous, overflowing abundance. Grace is a tsunami of forgiveness that collapses the hardest guilt and the most stubborn sin. Forgiveness. What Christ has done is to make it so that we aren't only *forgiven*, we have been made *right*. In Adam, God's judgment brought condemnation. And Christ, God's gift, brought justification.

The fact that myriad upon myriads of sins and guilt that accumulate through all the ages can be answered by God's free gift at the cross is beyond comprehension, and it is all grace.

All of this leaves us with two practical truths: God hates sin so much that it took only *one* to condemn the whole race. But greater even than His hatred of sin is His love for the Sinner. I

think verse 19 explains the whole Gospel. In Adam or in Christ. 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.* This is the Gospel.

Our Holy God is the creator of the whole universe and everything in it. He created man in His own perfect image, but when man sinned it created a chasm between God and man and condemned man to death, because the penalty for sin *is* death. Jesus Christ, the son of God, was born of a virgin and lived a perfect life. He willingly gave His life on the cross to cover our sins and provide redemption for man. The Bible says in Romans 10:9, *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

(Pastor prays)