

Main Idea: In Romans 5:18-21, we learn about two choices connected to the experience of abounding grace in our lives.

- I. Choice #1: We must choose between Adam and Christ (18-19).
 - A. What was true of Adam?
 1. Because of Adam's one sin, we were condemned (18).
 2. Because of Adam's one sin, we were made sinners (19).
 - B. What is true of Christ?
 1. Because of Christ, we may be justified (18).
 2. Because of Christ, we may be made righteous (19).
- II. Choice #2: We must choose between sin and grace (20-21).
 - A. Sin abounded under the Law.
 1. Sin increased.
 2. Sin reigned over us.
 - B. Grace super-abounded through Jesus Christ.

Personal Evaluation: Who's on the throne in your life?

1. Is grace affecting your speech? (Col 4:6; Eph 4:29)
2. Is grace affecting your priorities? (Tit 2:11-12; II Pt 3:18)
3. Is grace affecting your attitude? (Heb 12:15; Acts 4:33)
4. Is grace affecting your service? (Heb 12:28; I Pt 4:10)
5. Is grace affecting your prayer life? (Heb 4:16)
6. Is grace affecting your purity? (II Cor 1:12; Jude 4)

In our current series, “Amazing Grace,” we’ve been exploring great grace-texts in the Bible. We’ve learned about saving grace, sanctifying grace, serving grace, grace for suffering, and so forth. This morning we come to a critical text that tells us about abounding grace.

Scripture Reading: Romans 5:12-21

Does the name Adoni-bezek mean anything to you? There are quite a few people who have something in common with him. Adoni-bezek was a king, a king of the Canaanites around 1400 B.C. When Joshua and the Israelites entered the Promised Land, according to Judges 1, they conquered the people of Bezek and slew some 10,000. Their leader, Adoni-bezek, fled. The Israelite troops pursued and eventually caught him. Then they did something most intriguing. They cut off his thumbs and his big toes. Adoni-bezek's response was rather introspective, when he said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous message on this passage, see the Romans series in the 90s.

and big toes cut off have picked up scraps under my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them (Jd 1:7 NIV)."

You say, "I don't get it. What could I have in common with some madman that got his thumbs and big toes severed?" Think about the following observation by Stuart Briscoe (127-8), "Big toes give balance and thumbs provide grip. Without either a king cannot walk or grasp his sword. He must wobble about through life unarmed and unrespected. If, in addition to this, he must beg for scraps of food from another's table, he is a king in name only."

If you are a Christian, you are a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. We are royalty. We are invited to "reign in life by Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:17). Why then, if we are invited to reign, do many of us wobble and hobble through life? Why, instead of living as kings, do we stumble along in our Christian lives as if our big toes and thumbs had been removed?

One of the saddest sights to be seen is a defeated Christian. To see one who has been invited to feast in the bounties of heaven groveling under the table of the tyrant, Satan, is a great tragedy. Yet it is a common tragedy. It may be true of you.

What must we do if we are going to learn to reign as kings in the Christian life? We find the answer in Romans 5.

Notice the word repetition of the word "reign" here. In v 14, we're told that death "reigned" from Adam to Moses. According to v 17, because of Adam's sin, death "reigned." On the other hand, because of Christ's gift, we can "reign" in life through Him. In v 21 we are told, "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ."

Who's on the throne in your life? Who is reigning right now? You might respond, "I'm not sure. What are the choices?" We'll find out in Rom 5:18-21.

Main Idea: In Romans 5:18-21, we learn about two choices connected to the experience of abounding grace in our lives.

Nearly four centuries ago (in 1666), while in prison for preaching the gospel, John Bunyan wrote his own spiritual autobiography. He called it, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. It's a story that begins with guilt and despair and ends with a heart "full of comfort," a thankful heart for "grace abounding."² If you compare this book to Bunyan's classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, you'll notice many similar themes. In *The Pilgrim's Progress* Bunyan uses an allegory to tell his story. In *Grace Abounding*, it's straightforward narrative.

He wrote the book for his church family. He was their pastor, but it grieved him that he couldn't minister God's Word to them in person. So he did so through his pen. He wanted them to do as he does so transparently in this book. He shares, "It is profitable for Christians to be often calling to mind the very beginnings of grace with their souls."

Even the title itself tells us much about the book and the man. "GRACE ABOUNDING TO THE CHIEF OF SINNERS OR, A BRIEF RELATION OF THE EXCEEDING MERCY OF GOD IN CHRIST, TO HIS POOR SERVANT"

² http://www.ccel.org/b/bunyan/abounding/grace_abounding.txt

At the beginning Pastor John writes, "In this discourse of mine you may see much; much, I say, of the grace of God towards me. I thank God I can count it much, for it was above my sins and Satan's temptations too. I can remember my fears, and doubts, and sad months with comfort; they are as the head of Goliath in my hand. There was nothing to David like Goliath's sword, even that sword that should have been sheathed in his bowels; for the very sight and remembrance of that did preach forth God's deliverance to him. Oh, the remembrance of my great sins, of my great temptations, and of my great fears of perishing for ever! They bring afresh into my mind the remembrance of my great help, my great support from heaven, and the great grace that God extended to such a wretch as I."

He says, "...Great sins do draw out great grace; and where guilt is most terrible and fierce, there the mercy of God in Christ, when showed to the soul, appears most high and mighty..."

The Setting:

This morning, we come to the end of Romans 5 (note: we've been in Romans for nearly six months, and will be leaving this epistle for the next couple of months). Grammatically, the section before us is choppy and challenging. Theologically, it is rich and lifechanging.

If we're going to live successfully as Christians, we must identify the options. Here's the first choice we must make.

I. Choice #1: We must choose between Adam and Christ (18-19).

A. What was true of Adam?

Adam sinned. Adam was guilty of an "offense" (18). Adam disobeyed God's clear command, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat (Gen 2:16-17)." But Adam did eat. He sinned. And he did not sin in a vacuum. His sin affected and afflicted us.

How? We suffered two results.

1. Because of Adam's one sin, we were condemned (18).

V 18 "As by the offense of one (i.e. Adam) judgment came upon all men to condemnation."

V 18 begins "therefore." Paul is summing up the great truths he developed earlier in the chapter, and in the book. In effect, the "therefore" in v 18 takes us back to v 12 (verses 13-17 are a parenthesis; see KJV). Paul is resuming the thought revealed there, "Wherefore as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned."

Suppose one person from our country traveled to another country, and while there, assassinated their leader. What might that country do? It would certainly take action against the transgressor. It might even take action against the country of the transgressor by declaring war. Even though we had not committed the particular crime, we would

suffer the consequences of that crime (from Lloyd-Jones, 272). We would be considered enemies.

Paul says because of Adam's sin, we were condemned. When Adam sinned, he acted as our representative. It was as if we were there when he bit into that fruit. When he sinned, we sinned. When he was condemned, we were condemned. There was also a second result...

2. Because of Adam's one sin, we were made sinners (19).

V 19 "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners." Adam's sin brought punishment to all. But it did something else. Because of his sin, we were made sinners.

The Greek word translated "made" is much stronger than our English word. It means "to set down in the rank of," or "to place in the category of," or "to appoint to a particular class" (L.J. 271). Adam's sin put us into a category, a class. What class? "Sinners." Adam's sin did more than merely give us a sin nature (though it did that). When Adam sinned, we were made sinners. Theologically, that's called "Federal Headship."

Think of it in light of this explanation by Martin Lloyd-Jones (273), "We are not sinners because we have a sinful nature and because we commit acts of sin. It is the other way around. It is because we are sinners that we have this sinful nature and commit acts of sin."

Don't miss this. What Paul is saying is that what Adam did put everyone of us into the category of "sinners." Because of Adam's one sin, we were made sinners.

Application: On our own, we don't have the power NOT to be "sinners." Oh, we can educate a sinner, and give a sinner culture, but in the end, he's still a sinner. By the way, here is where the breakdown occurs in many humanist-based, reform programs. They focus on changing behavior, but they can't change the person. The problem is deeper than behavior. The problem goes back to Adam.

Is there hope for change? Yes! How? Through Jesus Christ.

B. What is true of Christ?

Two results are true because of Christ.

1. Because of Christ, we may be justified (18).

V 18 "Even so." In the case of Adam, the work of one affected the many. So with the last Adam, Christ (I Cor 15:45). "Even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."

The phrase, "the righteousness of one," stands in stark contrast with "the offense of one." If you're thinking, "I don't think it's fair that what one man did, namely Adam, should affect all of us," then consider this. Do you think it's fair that what Christ did should affect all of us?

Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, something we could never do. He achieved the standard of righteousness which Adam missed. Through His righteous life and death, He gained for us the justification of life. Is that fair? No, that's grace.

Paul highlights a second, related result in v 19.

2. *Because of Christ, we may be made righteous (19).*

V 19 "So by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Stop and ponder this amazing transfer. One man disobeyed God, and many were made sinners. Another man, the God-man, obeyed God, and many were made righteous!

What does Paul mean by "the obedience of one"? Chiefly, the cross. Phil 2:8 says concerning Christ, "And, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Heb 5:8 tells us, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." The cross was the culmination of Christ's obedience. Yet His entire life was redemptive.

Don't miss this. Through Christ's obedience, we are made righteous. Not through our effort, but through His. Remember, what was our original problem in Adam? Disobedience. Yet Christ did what Adam did not do. Christ did what we could not do. He obeyed the Father perfectly, in His life and in His death. Beloved, because of Christ alone, we are made right with God.

So let me ask you. Who's on the throne of your life? Here's the first contrast. Because of Adam, we were condemned and made sinners. Because of Christ, we justified and made righteous. There's a choice I must make, then. I must choose to live in light of what Christ has done for me. Successful Christians are those who do just that. They live with their eyes fixed on Christ. Is Christ on the throne of your life?

"In 1992 (story from Leadership Journal, Winter 93, p. 48) a Los Angeles county parking control officer came upon a brown El Dorado Cadillac illegally parked next to the curb on street-sweeping day. The officer dutifully wrote out a ticket. Ignoring the man seated at the driver's wheel, the officer reached inside the open car window and placed the \$30 citation on the dashboard. The driver of the car made no excuses. No argument ensued--and with good reason. The driver of the car had been shot in the head ten to twelve hours before but was sitting up, stiff as a board, slumped slightly forward, with blood on his face. He was dead. The officer, preoccupied with ticket-writing, was unaware of anything out of the ordinary. He got back in his car and drove away."

There are lost sinners all around us. They are still in Adam. They don't need a citation from us. They need a Savior. And we must tell them! With broken hearts, we must spread the word that Christ has reversed the fall of Adam.

There's a second choice we must make.

II. Choice #2: We must choose between sin and grace (20-21).

READ vv 20-21, "Moreover, the law entered..." What was true of sin?

A. Sin abounded under the Law.

V 20 says that the Law entered that the offense might abound. What does that mean? The NASB says, "The Law came that the transgression might increase." Two things, then, are true of sin.

1. *Sin increased.*

When God gave Israel the Torah, namely the Ten Commandments, sin abounded. Not that the Law was bad. No, the Law is holy, just, and good (Rom 7:12). In fact, the

Law is spiritual (Rom 7:14). The Law serves to restrain evil in the world (see: I Tim 1:9-11). How then did the Law cause sin to increase?

Think of this illustration. Suppose one day you were out for a drive, and came by my house. You noticed there were no cars in the garage (which revealed that noone was home). You decided you'd like to take a look around, so you walked around the house. You discovered the back door was open, and let yourself in. How would you feel as you stood there in the kitchen? Probably a little uneasy. Why? Because you were violating your conscience. Had you violated any written law? You couldn't think of any, so you kept looking around. In the garage, you noticed a few tools, and thought to yourself, "Hey, I could use that saw on the job I'm doing this afternoon. I'll return it later." On the way out, you noticed a sign by the door, "These tools are not to leave the garage." At that moment, what happened to you? Your sin just increased. It went from trespassing to willful transgression of written law.

Think about something. Before God gave Israel the Law in the 15th century B.C., were men sinners? Yes. They'd never seen the 10 Commands, but they were sinners. Why? Because they were guilty of trespassing. They were trespassing on God's earth, and ignoring Him. When the Law came, sin increased. Why? Because the Law clarified in black and white what God expected of those living in His world.

Which leads to a second truth about sin.

2. *Sin reigned over us.*

V 21 "That as sin hath reigned unto death." We live in a world where sin reigns. That's obvious. That's why our prisons are full. That's why every time you pick up our local newspaper, you read about someone being assaulted. Sin reigns unto death. Stuart Briscoe summed up the dilemma well (125), "Sin knows no bounds; death, like time and tide, waits for no man. Both march on in relentless, overpowering domination of the bleak human scene."

Yes, sin abounded under the Law. But that's not the end of the story!

B. Grace super-abounded through Jesus Christ.

V 20 says, "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." And v 21 continues the contrast, "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign." The words "much more abound" (20) are one Greek word. I use the word "super-abound."

No one is too far gone for grace. Sin abounded, but grace super-abounded. Sin takes you down, but grace lifts you up out of the pit. No matter who you are!

You see, grace is not some static, abstract concept. Grace is life-changing. In fact, in v 21 Paul says grace "reigns." How? Paul tells us in Romans 6, where we learn how grace can set us free from sinful patterns (see 6:14). Romans 1-5 are about justification (how God set us free from the penalty of sin). Romans 6-8 teach us about sanctification (how God sets us free from the practice of sin).

You see, if we are in Christ, we have another choice to make. It's a daily choice. It's a choice between sin and grace. Notice Rom 6:14, "For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

Personal Evaluation: Who's on the throne in your life?

I invite you to take person inventory. Who is on the throne of your life? Is Christ or Adam? Is grace reigning or is sin reigning? How can we tell? Consider the following checklist.

1. Is grace affecting your speech? (Col 4:6; Eph 4:29)

Col 4:6 says, "Let your speech be always with grace." Eph 4:29 admonishes, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good...that it may minister grace unto the hearers." Is your speech marked by grace?

2. Is grace affecting your priorities? (Tit 2:11-12; II Pt 3:18)

Tit 2:11-12 reads, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age." Which is more important to you--going to a football game or going to church? Spending time in the easy chair, or spending time in growing in the Word? Peter tells us that our #1 priority ought to be to "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (II Pt 3:18)."

3. Is grace affecting your attitude? (Heb 12:15; Acts 4:33)

Heb 12:15 tells us that if grace is reigning, there will be no room for bitterness, "Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you." Do you know what was a great mark of the early church? Acts 4:33 says, "Great grace was upon them all." They shared with each other. They cared for each other. They loved each other. Grace affected their attitudes.

4. Is grace affecting your service? (Heb 12:28; I Pt 4:10)

Heb 12:28 exhorts us, "Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." Are you involved in serving God? Are you involved in a ministry right now? I Pt 4:10 reminds us that ministry is the responsibility of every one of us, "As every man has received the gift, even so minister...as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

5. Is grace affecting your prayer life? (Heb 4:16)

Heb 4:16 "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace."

6. Is grace affecting your purity? (II Cor 1:12; Jude 4)

A phrase in the middle of II Cor 1:12 reads, "By the grace of God, we have behaved ourselves in the world." Jude warned of certain men who turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, that is, a license for immorality. When grace reigns, purity results. May the grace of Christ be seen in our lives. (see Leadership, Fall 93, p. 57)