

Sin, Grace and Two Humanities

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Preacher: Thomas Davis

[0 : 00] Okay, earlier in the year you were studying through the letter to the Romans, which is one of the great letters that we have in the New Testament.

You reached the middle of chapter 5 I think, and today we are going to resume that study and over the next few weeks we're going to continue looking at this wonderful letter that Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome.

It's a big letter, it's one of the longer ones, and it's full, absolutely full of amazing teaching. But the overall theme of the letter is really quite simple, because the letter to the Romans is all about the Gospel.

It's a marvelous explanation of the good news of Jesus Christ, and Paul wants us to provide us with an explanation of how the Gospel works. Now, if you weren't here for the series in the first half of the year, or if you can't remember much of what was said, don't worry at all, not all of us were here for the first part of the series, so it's okay to be like that.

But if you're new to Romans, or if you haven't looked at Romans, I want to just start with a two-minute look at this slide, which basically summarizes what Romans is all about. It's really like many of Paul's letters, it's in two parts.

[1 : 13] After a brief introduction at the beginning, you've got the first part, which is basically all about knowing the Gospel, explaining how the good news of Jesus works. That's middle of chapter one to the end of chapter 11.

You can subdivide that into three parts. Paul begins by talking about the problem, the fact that sin has broken our relationship with God. The world has rebelled against our Creator, and we've exchanged the truth of God for a lie.

We've rejected God and His righteous ways. And that problem has affected every single member of the human race. And Paul reminds us that it is the most serious and the most urgent problem facing humanity.

That's what Paul starts with, the problem of sin. But he then, in the middle of chapter three, tells us that God has a solution for this problem. And it's amazing to read of it, because Paul directs her attention to the cross of Jesus Christ, showing us that Jesus died in our place, and there an exchange takes place.

Our sin is placed on Jesus, and His righteousness is placed on us. And through that, we have hope. And so from chapter three, verse 21, he starts explaining the hope of the Gospel.

[2 : 33] The result of that exchange is that we are justified by faith. In other words, we are declared righteous before God. He looks at us and His judgment over us is that we are righteous.

Not because of our works, not because we deserve it, not because we've earned it, but because of a free gift from God, which is what we mean when we say it is by grace, is a free gift.

So then in chapter four, Paul talks a little bit more about justification, and he goes all the way back to nearly the very beginning of the Old Testament to talk about Abraham as an example of somebody who was justified by faith.

And in doing that, Paul wants to make very, very clear that justification is not a new thing. That was one of the big problems that Paul and the early Christian leaders faced. They were coming with this message of Jesus Christ, and lots of people who held on to the Old Testament were saying, hold on a minute, this is new, and you're rewriting our belief.

And Paul's saying, no, no, no, go right back to the very beginning. Go back to Abraham, one of the most important people in the Old Testament, and you'll discover that he too was justified by faith.

[3 : 44] This has always been the means through which God is going to save his people. So in many ways, Paul's focus in chapter three, chapter four is on justification by faith.

We then come into chapter five, where Paul goes on to talk about all the blessings that come after our justification. So if you like, he's taking us on a wee journey.

We start off with a problem of sin. He takes us to the cross where that problem is solved through our justification on account of what Jesus has done. And then he takes us beyond the cross to show us all the blessings that accompany our justification.

He's teaching us and reminding us that justification is not the conclusion of the Gospel. It's not the end point. In fact, it's just the start.

It's the doorway to a whole multitude of blessings. If after the service today, you read the first half of chapter five, you'll see that Paul says, now that we've been justified, we've got all sorts of blessings.

[4 : 42] We have peace with God. We have access to God. We have hope for the future. And we have God himself dwelling within us by the Holy Spirit. Paul wants us to see all the amazing blessings that are ours through faith in Jesus Christ.

And then Paul sums it all up by drawing a comparison between two people, between Adam and Jesus.

And that brings us to the passage that we read, which is a really, really interesting passage. And we're going to read a couple of verses from it again, just from verse 18 to verse 21. And as we read these verses, you have to have in your mind this whole idea that Paul is comparing Adam and Christ.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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. Now the law came into increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more so that a sin reigned to death.

[5 : 51] Grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. So we're summing up the whole of Christianity by drawing a comparison between Adam and Christ.

And so that means this is a really, really important point that Paul is making. But it can be a wee bit confusing.

And at first glance, this is one of these passages that looks a bit complicated. And so do not worry if, as Tom was reading through Romans, you were thinking, I'm not totally sure if I'm following this because it is a wee bit complicated.

But hopefully as we look at it together, it'll all become clear. So Paul is basing his argument on the fact that there are two categories into which humanity can be divided.

Now that's something that people often do, isn't it? So people divide the human race into two. So economically we speak of the rich and the poor. Politically we speak of the right.

[6 : 53] And the left, racially we speak about white and black. Geographically we speak about the West and then the rest of the world. We love dividing people into two categories.

You can probably think of more examples in your own mind. Paul is reminding us that in God's eyes there is only one valid categorization of the human race.

You are either in Adam or you are in Christ. And so here Paul is telling us that ultimately there are two humanities.

There is the humanity that is fallen and broken in Adam of which every single one of us are initially members. And then there's the humanity that is being rescued and restored in Christ of which we can all become members.

And every other distinction that we make, whether it's rich, poor, East, West, right, left, whatever it may be, every other distinction that we make is going to prove itself totally irrelevant in comparison to this distinction as to whether you are in Adam or in Christ.

[8 : 08] That is the most important question. Questions of race, economics, politics, yes they are important but they pale into total irrelevance compared to this question.

Are you in Adam or are you in Christ? That's the great theme that Paul has in these verses. And I want us just to say two things as we look at this together. We're going to say first of all that Adam and Christ are similar and then we're going to say in a bit more detail that Adam and Christ are different.

So first of all, very, very briefly, how is it that these two individuals, Adam and Christ, how are they similar? Well, Paul kind of reveals what he means in verse 14, he says that Adam is a type of the one to come.

You can see that in red there. The one to come, of course, is talking about Jesus. So Paul is saying that Adam, the first person who ever lived, is a type of Jesus. Now what does that mean?

Well, it basically means that there's a similarity and a connection in terms of who they are. Adam was something and Jesus is something and they both function in a similar way.

[9 : 17] What's the connection? Well, the similarity between them is in terms of what we're going to call federal headship. Now don't worry if you've never ever heard of that before and don't worry if it sounds complicated.

It's really, it's not complicated, it's quite straightforward. The word federal basically means the same word as covenant. So whenever you see that word federal in terms of theology, think covenant, same word, same thing it's been talking about.

So covenant headship, federal headship, we mean exactly the same thing. Adam is a covenant head or a federal head of a larger group of people and Jesus is a covenant head or a federal head of a larger group of people.

That means that in terms of how these two people relate to God, they do not stand as isolated individuals. They are instead representative of a much larger group.

So when God entered into a covenant relationship with Adam, it wasn't simply just with him. It was with all of humanity. So when you read about what God says to Adam at the very beginning, that has implications for all of Adam's descendants.

[10 : 26] Likewise, when God has covenant dealings with his son, Jesus Christ, that doesn't just affect Jesus. It affects all those who are united to him.

So Adam and Christ both function as federal heads. They represent other people. Now, we might think Thomas, this whole idea of federal headship, it sounds so weird. It sounds so technical and it sounds very abstract, but it's actually something that we live with every single day of life.

Because if and when Teresa may signs the deal to bring us out of the European Union, is she the only one who leaves? No.

You all leave as well, whether you want to or not, because she is functioning as a federal head and it happens in politics, it happens in local government, it happens all the time.

People deciding how to spend taxpayers' money, all of these things, it's all following the same principle of federal headship. So this is something that we're very familiar with and it's something that's very important in terms of understanding the gospel.

[11 : 30] So Adam and Christ both function as federal heads and the key point is that the whole of humanity, without exception, is represented by one of these two.

So there you go, there's a diagram showing you what it's like. There's a humanity that's in Adam, there's a humanity that is in Christ and there is no neutral ground at all.

If you think about the world, if you look at the world geographically, you've got the northern hemisphere and the southern hemisphere, don't you?

If you go on to the world, can you find a neutral ground between the two? No, you can't. You're either in one or the other. You cannot be in neither.

You have to be in one. And it's exactly the same here. All of humanity is in one of these two groups and the key point that we have to recognize first and foremost is that Adam's federal status is not good.

[12 : 37] It's not good. Just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all sinned.

Adam's realm has been ruined by sin and death. And the consequence of that are of immense seriousness to us because we initially are all under Adam's headship.

That's how you're born. You're born on the Adam side of the diagram, that side. And so his status has a massive effect on us.

And so we are caught up in the guilt of his first sin. We lack the original righteousness that we should have had. Our whole nature has been corrupted as a result. All of that summarized by a term we use, original sin, something that we're born with, something that we can't escape.

A good illustration of that is that you can't help what you pass on. You can't help what you pass on to the next generation. My wife has got beautiful red hair, and I always thought it would be lovely for my children to have red hair, but they all got my brown hair.

[13 : 53] It looks better on them than it does on me, but I can't change what gets passed on. You can't change it. And the same principle applies to this. The human race, therefore, is broken.

And you only need to turn on the news to see that that's true, don't you? So the humanity in Adam is caught up in a desperate state. We are caught up in that ourselves, but the amazing truth of the Gospel and the amazing message of Romans is that we have hope.

And the reason that we have hope is because although Adam and Christ are similar in that they're both federal heads, there are actually massive, massive differences between the two.

And that's what I want us to focus on in particular together for the next few minutes. What we're going to do is we're going to look at these differences because, essentially, as you read through Romans 12 to 21, you're reading about constant differences.

He says the one, the other, the one, the other. And Paul is drawing this comparison. And we're going to build things up step by step and see if we can identify these key differences between the two humanities.

[14 : 59] In order to see the contrast, we're going to apply, I suppose, if you like, the sort of slightly technical terms, but they're not complicated. And you all look very smart, so you'll be fine. Well, most of you look smart, so you'll be fine.

Okay, so here's some technical terms. We're going to just apply to this passage. Sometimes that's a good thing to do. When you read a passage of the Bible, have questions in your mind that you want to ask this question.

What's this saying? Who's it being written to? What's the background? What's the context? What are the themes being highlighted here? Always good to come to the Bible with questions. We're going to come with four questions in comparison to these two humanities.

We're going to ask what's the dominant principle in each humanity? We're going to ask what's the status of the members in each humanity? What's the mode of transaction? I'll explain what that means when we come to it. And then what's the end result?

See, it's not that technical at all. It's quite straightforward, so you'll be fine. So let's go through these one by one. First of all, in each humanity, there is a difference in dominant principle.

[15 : 57] So in which one? In each one, what is the dominant principle? Well, if you go to verse 21, you'll see the comparison. So that a sin reigned in death, grace might also reign through righteousness.

And so that's setting before us very clearly the fact that in Adam, sin reigns. In Christ's humanity, grace reigns.

In other words, in Adam's realm, sin is dominant. That's why there's lawlessness, pain, misery, and chaos in the world. That's why you read chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 of Genesis.

You see the world descending into a mess because sin has taken charge. But in Christ's realm, grace is dominant. And the chaos of sin has no power over Christ whatsoever.

So there's a difference in terms of dominant principle. In each humanity, there's also a difference between the status of the members. That's what's revealed to us in verses 18 and 19.

[16 : 58] It says, therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men. That's the status if you're in Adam. So one act of righteousness leads to justification for all and life for all men.

There's a difference in status. Sin leads to condemnation. So in Adam, our status before God is that we're guilty. Grace, on the other hand, leads to justification.

In Christ, our status before God is righteous. Revealed to that is the fact that that status is conferred upon us or transacted in a different way in each humanity.

So there's a difference in mode of transaction. So that condemnation comes to us in a certain way in Adam. And that justification comes to us in a certain way in Christ. And the difference is explained to us in verses 15 and 17.

I won't read it all, but you can see in the middle there where it's blue and red, you can see the difference for the judgment. It says there, for the free gift is not like the result of the one man's sin. So the difference for the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

[18 : 10] So the condemnation of sin is transacted as a judgment. In other words, it's what we deserve. But the justification of grace is transacted as a gift.

It's freely given and abounding in its scope. And all of this means that there's a difference in end result. On the one hand, sin results in death.

Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin. And so death spread to all men. Here Paul is basically saying that the reality of sin is proved by the reality of death.

Now that's a really important thing to remember because when you look back at the Old Testament, you think, okay, what's the definition of sin? Definition of sin is breaking God's law, isn't it?

Now you'd say, well, okay, hang on a minute. The law didn't come till later. So you think about the timeline of the Old Testament. You're at the beginning here. Paul, God makes a covenant with Adam beginning of the human race, but you've got to go quite a few books into the Bible before the law comes.

- [19 : 28] So we start with Genesis. Law doesn't come till the middle of Exodus. And so you think to yourself, well, hold on a minute. Does that mean there was no sin until the law came because the law, sin is breaking of the law?

Paul is saying, no, no, no, sin has always been in the world. The reason we know that is because people have died because that is the real end result of sin.

And that's reminding us of a crucial point. Sin and death are inseparable. Now we must, must recognize that. Sin and death are inseparable.

That's highlighted very clearly in this passage because Paul uses the two terms almost interchangeably. He talks about sin reigning. He talks about sin coming into the world and death coming into the world. His key point is that sin will always result in death.

And that was God's warning from the very beginning. He didn't say to Adam, if you eat the fruit, you will become a sinner. He says, if you eat the fruit, you will die.

- [20 : 33] So even people who did not sin in exactly the same way as Adam, and even though they lived before the law came in its detail in Exodus chapter 20, they are still affected by Adam's sin because they are still under the power of death.

And that's why when you read about people in Genesis, you see that although some trusted God and followed him, people were still corrupt and wicked in their own nature. Paul's great point is that sin came into the world through Adam.

That's affected every one of us because sin is a reality in our nature and death has spread to all. And Paul is reminding us of a simple point which is maybe easy to overlook, which is this.

Only sinners die. That's a really important biblical principle. Only sinners die. If we did not have a sinful nature, we would not die.

And the fact that we are dying and that we do die proves that we are sinners. We were not created to die. Death is an unwanted intrusion into human experience.

- [21 : 40] It's an enemy, not a friend. It's not meant to be there. And that is proved by a fact that comes later in the Bible. So we're saying only sinners die, yes?

Okay, you will say, ah, Thomas, you're wrong. Jesus died. He did. But in order to die, what did he have to do? He laid down his life of his own accord.

He said, no one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I receive from my father. The only reason Jesus can die is because he lay, he willingly laid down his life.

That's a crucial difference from us. We can't fight off death. We can't resist it. Sin results in death, but grace is different.

And the realm of Jesus Christ is different because grace brings life. Sin reigned in death. Grace might also reign through righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- [22 : 50] That's God's great goal, to give you life. That is his goal. He wants you to have life, and that makes perfect sense because God is the Creator. He is the giver of life. His plan for us is to have life.

He didn't create us to die. He created us to live. Sin has ruined that by making death a reality in our experience. And that's why God has come to take away the very thing that sin has taken away.

He's come to give us life. And that's why what is it that lies at the very, very, very heart of the Gospel? What is the central truth of the good news of Jesus?

Resurrection. Because Jesus has come to give us life. And so let's just go back to our table and summarize the differences.

In terms of dominant principle, in Adam's sin reigns. In Christ, grace reigns. The status of the members in Adam is that you're condemned. In Christ, you're justified. Mode of transaction in Adam is a deserved judgment.

[23 : 48] In Christ, it's a free gift. The end result in Adam is death. The end result in Christ is life. And so although Adam and Christ are similar in that they are both federal heads, there are massive, massive differences between these two realms.

And you might say to yourself, well, what makes the difference? Why are they so different? Why is one leading to death? And why does one lead to life? Well, Paul gives us the answer in verse 19. He says, for as by one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners.

So by the one man's obedience, the many will be made righteous. Federal head Adam disobeyed, but federal head Christ obeyed.

And if we are in Adam, then we are bound up in his disobedience. But if we are in Christ, we are united to his perfect obedience. And that is why it is absolutely vital that you put your trust in Jesus.

Because at the end of the day, there are only two humanities, and you are in one or the other. And you've got to ask yourself, which one is it going to be?

[25 : 11] But often this can be the point where we hit a problem. Because you look at these two humanities and you think, we know which one we want to be in. It's absolutely obvious. Nobody wants to be in Adam when you see it like that.

We all want to be in Christ. Nobody wants to die. We all want to live. But yet we can find ourselves crippled by the fact that we feel that we are too weak, or too sinful, or too broken to get from one to the other.

You talk about Adam's brokenness, failure, weakness, sin, and we can think to yourself, well, that's me. I'm as weak as Adam.

And you think, there's no way I can get into Christ. I'm stuck. And maybe you feel like that. Maybe you think, I would love to be one of these people who could say, yes, I'm a Christian. I'm in Christ. I know I've got that life.

But I just don't know. And I just don't think I can do it. I just don't think I am good enough. Maybe you feel like sin's reign on your life is too strong.

[26 : 14] Maybe sin has wrecked your life in this past week. Maybe nobody else knows, but maybe in your heart you have found it really, really difficult. And you think, well, sin's reign, sin's grip is too strong.

Well, if you feel like that, then you need to see that there's one more crucial difference between Adam and Christ that Paul highlights in these verses.

He says that in Adam and Christ there is a difference in quantity. What are you talking about? There's a quantitative difference between these two realms.

There's a difference in bigness, if you like. I know that's not a real word, but it's a good word. Difference in quantity. Paul is highlighting that sin is a massive problem.

So you look at that and he's saying sin is a massive problem. It is spread to all humanity. But do you know Paul's main point is not that sin is big.

[27 : 22] Paul's main point is that grace is bigger. And no matter how powerful sin is, no matter how much you've been caught up in its web, no matter how far short you've fallen, no matter how much sin abounds, grace abounds all the more.

One sin had a devastating effect. It led to the sin of many, but the free gift is big enough. Not just to fix the one man, Adam, it's big enough to abound over many trespasses.

And even when the law came in and highlighted the diagnosis, all the more clearly, grace responded by abounding all the more. That's why where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

And that's really the main point that Paul is making. And if you remember anything from this sermon, remember this, because this is the main point that Paul is making. He's saying there's two humanities. One has been wrecked by sin.

The other is being restored by grace. One is on a highway to death. The other is on the pathway to life. And the key point is that the federal head who leads to life is far bigger and far stronger than the federal head of the humanity leading to death.

[28 : 33] That means that whatever damage has been done to you because of your connection to Adam and because of the influence of sin in your life, Jesus has abundantly more than enough grace to save you and to bring you under his headship.

Because in Adam, sin spreads, but in Christ, grace abounds. And that means that Jesus has got enough grace for you.

His grace is big enough to take your sin onto his shoulders, every single one of them. His grace is big enough to forgive and forget every single mistake that you have made.

His grace is big enough to heal every wound and scar in your heart. His grace is big enough to bring you back no matter how far you've wandered.

Isn't that something we often think we think I've gone too far? Rubbish, theologically impossible. Because grace abounds.

[29 : 39] And no matter how far you go, his grace is big enough. His grace is big enough to catch you every single time you stumble. His grace is made perfect in all of your weakness and mine.

So in other words, if the devil tries to accuse you and say, you've done this, you've done that, you've done this, you've done that, you fail here, here, here, here, here and here, and you're a disappointment in all these different areas.

No matter how long the devil's list is, Jesus will say, I've got enough grace for that. Abundantly enough. Because if you put your trust in Jesus, his grace will never, ever run out.

And this is where we see just how amazing the grace of God in Jesus Christ really is. Because humanity in Adam is rebellious, wretched and broken, but Jesus has grace that's big enough to put it all right.

And that raises a really important question that we mustn't forget. How big is our grace?

[30 : 49] How ready are we to forgive people who hurt us? How ready are we to forget the mistakes and errors in other people's lives? How ready are we to resist the overwhelming temptation to criticize others, to judge others, to hold a grudge, to see the worst in people?

As believers as a church, our default position should always be towards abundant grace. We always want our grace to be as big as it can be.

So ultimately, there's only two humanities, and they're under two federal heads. But the difference between the two is massive.

In Adam we face death, but in Christ we have life, and all the other privileges that being under Christ's headship brings. Now, all of that maybe seems a wee bit, I hope that doesn't seem complicated.

I hope it doesn't seem too technical, because you're looking at all these things, you're thinking, well, that's quite technical, that's quite, you know, quite theological. And you can look at all that and you can think, you know, that's a really interesting theological topic.

[31 : 58] The whole idea of federal headship, that's fascinating, and it's interesting to be able to categorize it, and to use all these terms, dominant, principle, status of members, motor transaction, end result, quantitative difference. It all sounds very fancy, and all sounds very good, but I want you to see and to remember that this is not just a fascinating theological topic.

When you think about the federal headship of Jesus Christ, it is telling you that Christ is your defender, that He is your protector, He's your captain, He's your leader, you are on His team, you are under His guard, you are under His watch, and He is utterly, totally, forever, uncompromisingly committed to looking after you as one of His people, and to looking after every other person who comes under His headship by putting their trust in Him.

All of that is for you, and that's why the Gospel is such good, good news. So what's it going to be? Are you staying in Adam, or are you joining in with Christ?

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank You so much for our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ.

He is our head, He is the one, He is the head in whose humanity we want to be. We want to identify ourselves with Jesus, we want to follow after Jesus, we want to live every day of our lives for You.

[33 : 42] We thank You so, so much for the good news of the Gospel, and for everything that You've done for us. Lord, we are living proof that sin spreads because it's affected our lives and it ruins our lives, but how we thank You that where sin increases, grace abounds.

What an amazing God You are. We want to thank You, and we want to live for You. Amen.