

Romans 5 v 12-21

Introduction

This brings to the end our look at Romans 1-5, the portion of Romans dealing with basic facts of redemption. Romans 6-8 deals with sanctification and the work of the Holy Spirit. Romans 9-11 deals with the mystery of Israel's rejection, God's sovereignty, and man's freedom. Romans 12-16 deals with Christian conduct following from the doctrine.

The passage Romans 5:12-21 has been a great debate over the years, and a great influence on theology. Understood in various ways. We are going to trace out Paul's argument first of all. Not to expound in great detail because that would mean going over matters already touched on in previous messages. Then we will take one phrase used by Paul towards the end, and consider its wonder – **Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound** (5:20).

Paul's Argument in 5:12-21

Paul has so far in this chapter explained that salvation is through the death of the Son of God. But this leads to question – how can one person's sacrifice have brought such blessing to many? Sir Winston Churchill famously declared about the Battle of Britain "Never before has so much been owed by so many to so few". Here – so many owing so much to one person.

Paul answers by comparing Adam and Christ, two heads of human race, either in Adam or in Christ. Sin entered the world through one man, and death (which is the penalty of sin as far as human beings are concerned) came through sin, and thus death has spread to all men. Therefore, universal death because one man sinned. Death in all men today not because all men sinned *like* Adam, but all sinned *in* him. Proof is between Adam and Moses, the law-giver, people sinned, but sin was not reckoned against them. Therefore sin was not reckoned when no law to call it "sin". Yet still there was death. People died not because they sinned *like* Adam, but because they and all humanity are included *in* Adam, who was the head of the human race. When he sinned, all men sinned in him.

This is obviously difficult and most mysterious. One of those things we only know in part. Therefore many were affected by one man's deed. Because of Adam's sin, many now died. Because of Christ's death, many enjoy God's grace. From Adam, judgment and condemnation on human race. From Christ Jesus – members of new race enjoy justification. One man's sin leads to death. One man's obedience and death leads to grace, righteousness and meaning in life. One man's disobedience means many are made sinners. One man's obedience means many are constituted righteous.

Therefore two heads of human race. In Adam is sin, condemnation and death. In Christ is grace, justification and life. Complete and absolute contrast between the two. Each person is either in Adam or in Christ. All are born in state of Adam. But by grace and faith some are born into new race whose head is Christ. Therefore whether

we are condemned or justified, dead or alive, depends on whether we belong to old humanity begun by Adam, or new one begun by Christ.

Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (5:20)

επλεονασεν η αμαρτια, υπερεπερισσευσεν η χαρις

Grace is overflowing, mighty flood let loose, sweeping all before it. RSV translates this as “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more”. Where sin is, grace not just keep balance but does much more. Paul is thrilled by the mighty, glorious power called grace. God’s undeserved favour, kindness to undeserving people, something that is freely given. Where sin is at work, there is grace overflowing in triumphant power. To be traced in human history and in human lives.

Human History. Bible story is history of struggle between sin and grace, with grace ultimately triumphant. Grace was the only power big enough to deal with human sin. Almost feel sin will triumph. But grace revives and reasserts itself. Not just offered to us, but it is a mighty power in human history, and lives. Grace acts and reigns as a king. All our salvation is of grace from beginning to end.

First operated before creation. Christ **was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world** (1 Peter 1:20). Whole scheme of salvation. Plan of redemption by whole of trinity was prominent in minds of old theologians. All steps and programme of reign of grace was planned then.

Story of Fall in Eden. At once promise is given that the seed of woman will crush the serpent’s head. He to bruise heel of seed. Abounding wickedness of Noah’s time. But Noah and his family are spared. Then call of Abraham, from whom he forms his chosen people. Then line through Isaac. Then Jacob, not elder brother Esau, is chosen. After 12 sons, Judah is chosen. Line of promise to be through him.

Exodus following rescue of Moses. Choice of David and achievements of David. Captivity and return from Babylon. Finally, in fullness of time, **God sent forth his son**. Exact time – nothing haphazard or accidental about it. Fulfilment of prophecies shows that grace is reigning. Definite plan. Absolute control. God is holding the reins. The Cross because sin abounds. But grace, by determined counsel and foreknowledge of God. Offered one sacrifice for sin forever.

Triumph of grace in early church. There were times in the history of the Christian church when there was great spiritual darkness, and heresies abounded. It looked as if the church had breathed it’s last, it was so small, miserable and unworthy. Then grace revives the work. Grace carries on its purpose. If the church had been left to us and people like us, the story would have ended years ago. But it wasn’t left to us – but to grace.

What of the future? The outlook is grim indeed. But Jesus is coming back. He will have the last word. Salvation will be complete. New heaven and new earth, unmarked by ravages of sin. For people of God there will be unspeakable glory and joy. To find their state – eternal state of men under reign of grace. To be perfect. To be glorified

with whole world and universe. To spend eternity in glorious presence of God. Final triumph of grace.

Individual lives of the redeemed. Where sin abounds, grace overflows. Each individual life is a triumph of grace.

“Wonderful trophy of Grace”

Consider election **Chosen us in him before the foundations of the world... Predestined us unto adoption** (Ephesians 1:4-5). **If any man be in Christ he is a new creature** (2Cor 5:17). **Justified freely by his grace** (Romans 3:24). All these promises start with grace. All are the outworking of glorious and eternal plan. If left to us, we would still be where we once were. Paul the persecutor said **But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain** (1Cor 15:10).

The enemies of Christ – world, flesh, devil. Only grace could deliver from that mighty and evil tyranny. **Work out your own salvation... for it is God which worketh in you** (Phil 2:12-13). We can work it *out* because he has already been working *in*. Grace supports us in Christian service. **I labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily** (Col 1:29). Thorn in the flesh **My grace is sufficient for thee. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For when I am weak, then am I strong** (2Cor 12:9-10).

We may go through storms and trials but God will not forsake his people. What of the end of the story? **He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ** (Phil 1:6). **Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand** (John 10:28). Grace initiates salvation and then completes it. **Neither death nor life, ... Shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Romans 8:38-39).

*“My name, from the palms of his hands,
Eternity cannot erase.
Impressed on his heart it remains
In marks of indelible grace”*

Conclusion

Draw comfort from these truths. No need to be alarmed or excited about present times. Christianity is at a low ebb in our country, but this has happened many times before. No need to worry about the future of the church or our own eternal destiny – it is all in his hands. No power on earth can frustrate God’s purposes of grace and overthrow his programme and objective.

Challenge from this passage – have we been conquered by this grace? Are we under tyranny of sin or under reign of grace? Grace makes all things new, gives absolute assurance for the future. Nothing can rob us of the future.

Encouragement to lay hold and rejoice in grace. To grasp salvation by grace, and receive assurance, joy, poise, confidence, victory and triumph. Reflected in great hymn-writers:

“Rejoice the Lord is King”
(Charles Wesley)

*“Fading is the worldling’s pleasure
Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion’s children know”*
(John Newton)

*“Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given”*
(Augustus Toplady)

“Jesus shall reign where’er the sun”
(Isaac Watts)