

First Principles

Romans Series by Sinclair B. Ferguson

Text: Romans 5:12-21

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OPENING PRAYER:

Our God and Father, with all our hearts, we praise our Lord Jesus Christ. What a great Savior he is. We thank you that he has become our priest, and sacrificed Himself on the cross for our pardon and restoration. Thank you, that he is our king, and he reigns over us and in us and for us. And thank you that he is our prophet, and that he continues to speak to us through His word. To guide us and direct us. We pray that by His Holy Spirit, we may become conscious of his ministry to us, making his own word plain and clear to us. Enabling us to understand His grace. To receive His truth. To be molded by his word. And so to have the word of Christ dwelling in us richly as we sing, and as we teach one another, and as we encourage one another. That our lives may become a melody of praise to you. And a melody of grace to one another. And a melody of gospel good tidings to the world in which we live. So we pray that you would teach us again, the depths of our need and of our sinfulness. And show us our Savior and all His majesty, and glory and power. That we may rejoice, this day, and especially through the accumulated blessing of the hours in which we have worshipped you and learned from your word. And fellowshiped publicly and privately. Oh, Lord, we pray that you would crown this day with your loving kindness, and speak to us we pray through your holy Word. For Jesus Christ, our Savior's sake. Amen.

Please be seated.

SERMON:

Now, as I said, it would be very helpful for you, I think, probably more essential this evening, and other evenings as we turn to the study of Romans, chapter five, verses 12 through 21, to have your Bibles open before you. I'm sure as perhaps you have read this passage in advance of our evening service, or as the passage has just been read, in our hearing, you realize that there is something of a difference between Romans five verses one through 11, and Romans five, verses 12 through 21. And one of the differences is obviously this: Romans five one through 11 causes our spirits and our affections and emotions to soar to the highest heights of Christian enjoyment in the riches of God's grace that are expounded for us there. But Romans 5:12 to 21, which can have no less effect on our affection, and our emotions causes our minds to expand to try to grasp the sheer majesty and grandeur of what it is that

the apostle Paul is teaching the Roman Christians, and through them in this inspired letter, teaching the Church of God in every generation.

And as I was thinking about this evening, grateful to Matt Lucas, for leading us in the past three Sunday nights, in these few verses at the end of Romans five one to 11, it would have been a neat but nasty trick to have encouraged him, actually to have taken Romans 5:12 through 21. And then when I returned, I could simply have sailed on from these difficult verses. But difficult though they are, they are worth every ounce of your mental energy to try to understand. Because they will give you a different view of history. And then giving you a different view of history, as we go on from these verses, they lay the foundation for some of the most important things you could possibly know about living the Christian life. And that is the reason why we're going to spend some time working patiently through these verses doing what the Apostle Peter encourages us to do, girding up the loins of our minds, that we may follow the reasoning of the Apostle Paul. And as we do so, begin to enjoy more and more the riches and the depths of the gospel.

It dawned on me actually, I think when I was grading a theology exam from a seminary student. He hadn't actually done very well in any of the questions. But there was one particular question in which to a not too difficult problem set to him he had answered the question in about eight or nine lines, rather than three or four pages. And as I read with some discouragement, thinking, I must be the most hopeless teacher in the universe, I began to realize that one of two things had happened: either he had never studied (shame on him), or his mind had gone blank in the exam and he had forgotten everything he had read, and everything I had tried to teach him. And so I got these eight or nine miserable lines, in answer to the question. And I thought this to myself, because I knew the man, I thought, you are a man who knows your Bible well enough to have gone back in your memory to what the Bible has to say, in answer to this question. And built up from first principles, an answer, that would at least got you a B minus, instead of the miserable grade that I am just about to give to you. And it dawned on me, then, that probably he'd never been taught to go back to first principles.

That was underscored for me recently, when one of our members said that she was actually in graduate school before anybody sat her down, and said, now, go back to first principles. I don't know whether it's disappeared in our education. But I tell you, it has certainly disappeared among many Christian's thinking. We do not go back to first principles, and understand that the gospel is a glorious, coherent, marvelous message that fits together. And therefore it's important for us to spend time on those things that are absolutely foundational. That give us the foundation stones and the foundation of the building of the gospel, and therefore, the foundation of the building of our Christian life.

And in some ways, that's exactly what the Apostle Paul is doing here. He has been expounding, you remember, the depth and universality of the sinfulness of men and women. And then he has gone on to speak about the riches and the marvels of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And what Christ has done in his life and death and resurrection, and triumph over sin and death, and Satan and hell. How he has provided a salvation that is perfectly suited to the needs of sinners. Particularly in these amazing verses, Romans five one through 11, he has brought us, as it were, to the very ante room of heaven's glory. He said, "Because we are justified by faith, we have peace with God and we rejoice, we boast, in our hope of the glory of God". And it's so great this grace, he says that we even "boast and rejoice in our sufferings". And then way beyond boasting in our sufferings and rejoicing in our sufferings, the ultimate transformation of our lives. That we who had nothing to boast in before God actually begin to boast and rejoice in God himself because of the way in which he has poured out His grace upon us.

One of the things the Apostle Paul is doing in these verses 12 through 21 of chapter five, is as it were saying, now, how can it be that sin has universally spread? And how can it be that there is grace in Jesus Christ that is greater than all our sin? And how can this be, that what one man did on the cross can possibly bring salvation to an untold multitude of people? And it's these concerns that link Romans chapter five, verse 12, to everything that he's been saying in the epistle thus far; and, particularly to Romans chapter five, verse one. Therefore, he says, I want you to understand the foundations of this gospel that I've been expounding to you. And I want you to see the riches of God's purposes in history, that you may see yourself set in Christ, in all that Jesus Christ has done for you. Because in fact, that language is of the very essence of everything Paul is going to say, from chapter five verse one, through to the end of chapter eight, verse 39.

You notice it here in chapter five verse 12, it's "in Christ" or "through Christ, that we've received the reconciliation". And again in verse 21, it's "through righteousness, that grace reigns to eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord". And in chapter six verse 23, there is a "free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ, our Lord". And in chapter seven verse 25a, "Who is going to deliver me from this body of death? thank God, he will do it through Jesus Christ." And right at the end of that great poem of praise in Romans chapter eight, where he says, "Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is ours in Jesus Christ, our Lord."

And so as it were, he's brought us to Jesus Christ. He's shown us something of the riches of grace that are found in Jesus Christ. But now he wants to take us back absolutely to first principles. To the very foundation stones of how God deals with and saves sinners. And in order to do that, he gives us this amazing section, these remarkable 10 verses from verse 12 through to verse 21. That, as I say, stretch our thinking. But when our thinking stretches with them, we begin to appreciate in a fresh sense the magnitude of the salvation that is ours in Jesus Christ. And just to give a little glimpse of what is yet to come. Not, I think this evening, but some future evening. One of the things that Paul is going to say is this, there is more grace in Jesus Christ, than there is sin in you. There is more grace in Christ, than there is sin in you. And he's wanting, yes challenging our thinking, bringing into our minds, or at least some of them, concepts with which we may be relatively unfamiliar. He's challenging us to think through the first principles of God's dealings with the whole of humanity. So that at the end of this passage, we may be absolutely convinced, as we live our lives as we are sometimes overcome by our frailty and our sinfulness, there is more grace in the Lord Jesus Christ, than there is sin in me. Because that is true, that grace will reign in me to eternal life.

Well, I simply this evening want to try and give you a kind of outline of what the apostle is saying here that will help us plod our way through the details of his teaching. And the outline is fairly simple, really. You'll notice if you have an English Standard Version, that the passage divides into three sections: first, verse 12, through 14; then second, verse 15, through 17; and, third, verses 18 through 21. And these verses convey to us three things that Paul is doing.

First of all, he is introducing to us two unique men: Adam, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, he is drawing a contrast between the actions of these two men. And thirdly, he is drawing a comparison between the results of the actions of these two, unique men. So here are three basic things to look for in Romans 5:12, through 21. The identity of the two men, the nature of their two acts, and the comparison of the effects of what they have done. And Paul is really saying to us in this way, as we get our hands mentally -- as we get our hands round this teaching, our sense of the magnitude of the

gospel will simply grow and grow and grow. And we will begin to understand where we fit into the purposes of God, and therefore the extraordinary nature of the blessings that flow to us through our Lord Jesus Christ and in fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, first of all, the apostle introduces two unique man. One man obviously is Adam. He mentions him doesn't he, in verse 14, when he says death reigned from Adam. But it's clear, it's about Adam he's speaking, in verse 12. "As sin came into the world through one man, and death came through that sin, that death", verse 14, "reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam." So he names the first man Adam. He is convinced, of course, that Adam is a real historical figure.

Now, who is the second man? Well, he doesn't mention the second man by name in this section. But he describes him right at the end of the passage, "Adam, who was a type." That is a kind of advanced picture. "Adam, who was a type of the One who was to come." And you don't need to be all that familiar with the Bible, especially with a New Testament, to understand that the one who was to come is our Lord Jesus Christ. You could guess that. But Paul doesn't leave us to guess it, because he goes on to speak, for example, in verse 15, about that one man, Jesus Christ. And again, at the end of verse 17, the one man, Jesus Christ. And right at the end of the passage and verse 21, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

So here, Paul has two individuals in mind. Adam, the first man in history, and our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who came to be the Savior of sinners. Actually, although he spends a great deal of his time talking about Adam, he's only talking about Adam, because he wants to help us to understand the Lord Jesus Christ.

I don't know if you've ever gone into a jeweler shop, perhaps some of you have got engaged recently. And you men, you've gone very quietly into a jeweler shop as heavily disguised as possible. With some embarrassment told the jeweler -- you know, they always can tell can't play. They know you've never bought a diamond ring in your life before. Let me show you some rings, they say to yourself. Now it's a long time since I did this, and I didn't have the courage to do it on my own. But what I remember is that almost without you noticing it, the jeweler does something before he shows you the rings. Do you remember what he does? He slips out the black cloth and he places it over the glass. You didn't notice he did that? Why did he do it? Because he wanted you to see the sparkle of the diamond by way of contrast with that black cloth that would make it shine in its full luster and glory. And make you say, I'll take the more expensive one if that's okay. Against your better judgment, but you're never regretted it. Now, that's what Paul is doing. He is setting these two men before us, in contrast, because he wants us to see that the greatness of the grace of Jesus Christ actually is shown only in its full luster when we understand what Jesus Christ has done against the dark back cloth of what Adam has done. And the most important thing for us to understand about what Paul is saying here is this, that while he speaks of Adam and the Lord Jesus as historical figures, he is also focusing our attention on the fact that they both served (this is why Adam was the type of the One who was to come) they both served as representative figures. In other words, the secret -- the key to how Paul understands what Adam has done, and what Christ has done and what the acts of each of these men could possibly have to do with you and me is simply this: he understands that while they are historical men, they are not only historical man. They serve each in his own place, as representative men. So that everything each of them does, can be accounted to everyone they represent.

That's why if you remember, in that also rather complex passage that is sometimes read at funeral services in the Christian Church, the apostle Paul has this very interesting way of speaking about Adam and about Christ. He speaks about the first Adam, and the last Adam. The first Adam is the Adam of Genesis chapters one through four. The last Adam is of course our Lord Jesus Christ. But then he describes them in a rather interesting way. He describes Adam as the first man and the Lord Jesus as the second man. Why does he describe the Lord Jesus as the second man? He knows full well, that there have been many men between Adam and Jesus. Well, he calls him the second man, because Adam was the first representative man, the head of the whole human family. And there never has been another head like that, until the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Actually, we've been seeing some of this in Luke's Gospel, haven't we? How Luke writes, as it were into the very fiber of the gospel, that what the Lord Jesus has come to do, is intimately connected with what Adam did, or with what Adam failed to do.

In all poetry, there is probably strangely no better representation of this than the words of Cardinal Newman. Some of you know these words, because you have heard Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*. And that hymn that breaks forth, "Praise to the holiest in the height, and in the death be praised and all his words most wonderful, most sure and all His ways." A Newman says this, "Oh loving wisdom of our God, when all was sin and shame, a second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came. All wisest love, that flesh and blood that did in Adam fail, should strive afresh against the foe, should strive and should prevail." And you see what he's grasping after. He is actually grasping after Paul's teaching here in Romans five and in First Corinthians 15. That when Adam sinned, he sinned not just for himself, but for all whom he represented. And when our Lord Jesus Christ, obeyed and died, he obeyed and died not just for himself because he did not need to obey or die or even come into the world. He came into the world as the second man and the last Adam, and obeyed and died on behalf of all those for whom he came into the world to be their glorious representative before the face of God.

Now that kind of thinking actually isn't so unusual. We have representatives ourselves. And they vote on our behalf. And when they cast their vote on our behalf, it counts as our vote. And we've got pictures of this in various places in the Old Testament scriptures as well. Representative people. The high priests, who carried the names of the children of Israel on his shoulders, and on his breastplate. Who in everything he did, did it not just for himself but for all who belonged to him. We see the same thing and the young David, before He is exalted to the throne of Israel. When he goes out to do battle with Goliath. And when he slays, Goliath, he has victory over all the Philistines. And Israel is conqueror. So that what little David did with his slaying and his stones, as it were, counts for all of Israel. So that all of Israel might go home. And those soldiers say to their wives, when they ask them, well, what was the result of the fight, they would say, we won.

And this is the picture that Paul is painting for us. He is saying, now these blessings of the gospel that come to this awful sinfulness of your life, I want you to go back with me to the first principles of God's dealings with men and women, and to understand that underneath all of this. Underneath the sin and the failure stands the sin and the failure of the first man, Adam, who was our representative head. And against that dark back cloth, they are shines this glorious work of our Lord Jesus Christ. He came into the world to be our representative head in order that what he would do for all those for whom he lived and died would count as theirs.

And so this is a gloriously expansive picture of the foundations of our salvation as Paul introduces us to these two unique men. And we can hardly speak of them without noticing how Paul then goes on to contrast these two men's acts. Notice the way he puts it. He describes, for example, in verse 12, "the sin of the one man and the death that came through his sin." And again in verse 16, he speaks about that "one man's sin". Now, just in parenthesis here, who was the first sinner, actually? Who took the apple? Who first of all disobeyed God. It was Eve, wasn't it? And you see that historical fact is a clue to what Paul is saying here. He's not saying, well Eve was the one who started this whole sorry mess. Because he understands that God at the beginning was not dealing with us as isolated individuals. But he was dealing with us in terms of Adam the head. Actually, if truth be told, Adam really sent first into he abandoned his responsibility to his wife. That was actually his first sin. His responsibility to his wife was to say, no dear. Let us be submissive to our Heavenly Father. This is simply the way of disaster. See how Paul has grasped all this. It's embedded there in the text of the early chapters of the Bible. And he understands that God had made Adam the representative head of us all. So that it was in Adams sin that we all fell. And he describes that sin in many ways. Verse 14, as the breaking of a command. Verses 15 and again, in verse 17, and 18 -- as a transgression, as a trespass. Verse 19, as an act of disobedience, as a result of which sin entered the world. Death followed. Judgment and condemnation was the result. There was, as it were, a tsunami of sin and condemnation flowed to us. Because when Adam acted, he didn't act as an isolated individual. He acted as the representative head of the whole of humanity. And the proof of that, says Paul, lies in the fact that even before the law was in place -- and of course you need law in order to be able to count sin, -- even before the law was in place men and women died. Why did they die? They died because he says they were implicated in the sin of Adam, who brought the whole human race under the condemnation of God in this disastrous choice and failure that he made.

But then you see, there is good news. This Adam was a type of the One who was to come, and just as what he did for all those whom he represented would be counted to them. The glorious thing is, that God has so constituted the human race, that our Lord Jesus Christ might enter it and take our flesh. Become flesh of our flesh and born of our bone, and as our representative and substitute, he might undo that which Adam did. He might do that which Adam failed to do. And he might offer Himself as a sacrifice to bear God's judgment and condemnation upon Adam, for what he had done in rebellion against Him.

"Oh wisest love that flesh and blood that did in Adam fail, should strive afresh against the foe should strive and should prevail." And so you see, the marvelous picture he's giving us of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's as though he's painting Christ on the largest possible canvas of history and saying, do you see the disaster of what Adam did, and the awful tragedy that it brought into the world, in sin and death and condemnation and judgment and alienation from God. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the last Adam, because when he has finished his work, there is no need of another. Came into the world as the second man -- to the fight. And throughout the whole course of his life, as we've actually seen in Luke's gospel, right from that genealogy that describes both Adam and Jesus, as the sons of God our Lord Jesus Christ comes into the world. And where Adam failed, Christ succeeded. Where Adam succumbed to the tempter, Christ overcame the tempter. Whereas as the early fathers of the Christian Church used to delight to say, where at the tree, Adam brought the whole of humanity into ruin, at the tree of Golgotha, our Lord Jesus Christ, brought his people into salvation.

And so through the whole course of his life, our Lord Jesus Christ is obedient to His Heavenly Father, as this second man and last Adam. He always does what pleases his father -- unlike Adam. And then,

having lived in obedience to the Heavenly Father, not just for his own sake. He had no need to come into the world for his own sake. He came into the world, to be obedient to the Father in my place and your place. And then to offer himself up on the cross in our place as a sacrifice for our sins. And then, as it were, to break through into the glorious new world order of the resurrection to begin a whole new humanity all together, that he might actually finally accomplish what presumably, Adam would eventually have experienced if he'd been obedient to His Heavenly Father. He would have been brought from that period of probation, into a period of glorification and joy, and even nearer access to the presence of God than he had ever known. Oh, says Paul, do you see how -- do you see the scale on which God is working? And do you see therefore against the dark background of what Adam has done and what he has brought into the world? My dear friends, it's all over our television sets and our magazines and our media, that this world has been brought to an appalling spiritual ruin through Adam. Oh, the glory of what Jesus Christ has done, that he might enter into the world and reverse everything that Adam has done by his obedience.

It's interesting, isn't it? Just to see that comparison. Do you see what Paul compares? He compares the one sin of the one man Adam, that brought us all to ruin. With the entire life of obedience, and the awful sacrifice of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the most disproportionate reality in all history. That Adam's sin brought me to ruin and Christ's 33 years of obedience to His Heavenly Father and His agonizing sacrifice on the cross for my sins is needed to restore me to God.

And you see that's why the third thing that Paul points out in this passage. First, the two men with their unique identities. And then the two acts that he contrasts: the disobedience of the one and the obedience of the other. That's why he runs on to compare the two results in verses 18 through 21. Just as one trespass led to condemnation for all, so this whole life, this one act of righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ leads to justification and life for all. As by one man's disobedience, the many are constituted sinners. So by the obedience of the one man, Jesus Christ, will many be constituted righteous. So that, notice the words in verse 21, "as sin reigned in death, grace might reign through righteousness, to eternal life."

You see what he's saying? He's saying, I've been comparing these two men. I've been showing you, he says, how they're both representative figures. I've been contrasting them, in the one act that they did. The one act of disobedience and the one long act of obedience. But dear friends, he says, in Rome, don't miss this. That there's no proportion between the two of them. There is no proportion between what Adam did and what Christ has done. It's not -- he's saying you know, it's not that it's a boldless draw, or that it's one each. It's that for all the tragedy that Adam has brought into the world, Jesus Christ has far exceeded all that Adam has done by his sin and disobedience in the way in which he's poured out His grace upon. And as I said, at the beginning, the reason he's saying this to us -- the reason he's wanting us to think down in these terms about our Lord Jesus Christ, and see the proportions of what Christ has done -- That actually he's been doing, he's been doing something, as it were, that transforms the whole of our history, and makes us see ourselves in an entirely different light altogether. This is my basic problem by nature, I belong to the family of Adam, and my father has brought our spiritual condition into appalling ruin. Thanks be to God Jesus Christ has come. And in him it's possible, as Isaac Watts says, "In Him, the tribes of Adam boast more blessings than their father lost". And he's doing all this really, for one simple reason. He's doing this to underscore for us that our greatest conceivable privilege in all the world is to find ourselves in Jesus Christ, and no longer in Adam. And the greatest need an individual person could ever have is to get out of Adam. And be brought into the family of Jesus Christ. Because in the family of Adam there is nothing but sin and condemnation and

death. But in the family of Jesus Christ, there is righteousness and justification and everlasting life. And perhaps the most amazing thing of all, he says, is at the beginning of verse 15. It is, he says, "a free gift". An absolutely free gift to which we contribute absolutely nothing. Not our good works. Not our sanctification. Not our Christian service. Not our leadership in God's Church. We contribute absolutely nothing to this. It is a free gift.

And you know that does two things to us. Number one, it humbles, it humbles Christian pride. Doesn't it? No matter how high you may have been raised in sanctification and holiness, you have still contributed absolutely nothing to your justification in the sight of God. Oh that says to me, oh don't let your Christian service become confused with your gospel righteousness. And the other thing it does is to come to those of us who are broken and have tried everything. Sought to improve ourselves. Heard God's word and said to ourselves, I must try better. I must work harder. I must keep God's law. I must be a more faithful church member. And it says to us, oh, dear one, give it all up. Because it's a free gift to you in Jesus Christ. He'll give you all this for absolutely nothing because it's his grace. Isn't that something?

Well, are you in Christ tonight? Clothed in his righteousness divine? Thank God Thomas Duffy James is in Christ tonight. Because apparently, he's done worse than the words on his jacket. And so have I and so have you. But there's a free gift. Now, come and take it. And if you've taken it 1000 times, come and be refreshed in it again. And begin to enjoy in a fresh way the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, how big the gospel is. How great your Son our Savior is. How amazing is grace. Oh, Father, fill us with that sense that your grace is amazing. And that our Savior is great and marvelous. And help us, we pray to rejoice in all that is ours. In Jesus Christ our Lord. We pray this in His name. Amen.