

2. Justification and Life in Christ (5:15-19)

In the preceding section Paul began to introduce the relation between Adam and Christ, only to interrupt himself in order to clarify how it is that death spread to all men through the fact of universal sin. Lest he be misunderstood by his readers as arguing that all men since Adam die because all commit sin, Paul used the Law of Moses to prove otherwise. For the sanction of *death* - which finds its essence in estrangement from God - was issued in relation to God's direct command to Adam (Genesis 2:16-17). This being the case, why is it that all of Adam's descendents suffer this death of estrangement (and the physical death that accompanies it) when they have not violated the command that incurs it? In fact, prior to Sinai mankind did not sit under any explicit commandment, for the Law did not come until Moses. The only explanation for all men suffering the penalty of death is that they are guilty of Adam's transgression against God's command in Eden - his violation was the violation of all his descendents. In this way, "*all in Adam die.*"

But Paul's point was not simply to affirm the imputation of Adam's sin. His concern was to show that Adam anticipated Christ as type to antitype: *Jesus Christ, as the "last Adam," is the fulfillment of the first Adam.* The declaration of this typological relation forms the close of 5:14, and in the succeeding five verses Paul showed how it is that Adam is a type of Christ. Fundamentally, the typological correspondence between Adam and Christ is located in the issue of *representation*. Adam was to the created order and humanity what Christ is to the created order and humanity. The first Adam stood as head over the age that was, so that his action implicated the entire created order, and not simply his descendents (cf. Genesis 1:27-28, 3:17-19). So likewise the last Adam stands as head over the age that is now and forevermore, with his action implicating the entire created order (Ephesians 1:7-10; Colossians 1:15-20; also Romans 8:18-22). As the creature *man* suffered death in Adam, so humanity finds the renewal of life in Christ.

As this typological relation is the thematic framework for 5:15-19, so the passage is structured around four points of correlation between the two "Adams" and those implicated by them. The first two involve *negative* correlation, whereas the latter two involve *positive* correlation. That is, in verses 5:15-16 Paul established correspondence between Adam and Christ by emphasizing specific points of difference between their respective acts. Conversely, in 5:18-19 his correlation is made by direct parallelism.

- a. The first point of correlation is found in 5:15. Like its successor in 5:16, Paul established his correspondence by setting the respective consequence of each "Adam's" action in differing contrast. But in the present case, the point of difference focuses upon *quality* rather than substance. For in the case of both Adam and Christ, their determining action resulted in a consequence to "the many." Yet Paul regarded the "free gift" associated with Christ's action as being of greater significance than Adam's transgression and the death that resulted:

*"But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, **much more** did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, **abound** to the many."*

The key to understanding the nature of this superior greatness is Paul's repeated use of the word *grace* and the related concept of *free gift*.

- In the first occurrence of the term, *gift*, Paul used a noun that shares the same Greek root as the noun *grace*. But in the second occurrence he chose a different term that refers more to the actual benefit or endowment received than the gracious quality of that benefit (as with the former).
- Although some have viewed Paul's use of different terms as merely stylistic, it appears that he was making an important distinction. For in 5:15a he contrasts the "free gift" (*charisma*) with Adam's transgression. In 5:15b he indicates the "gift" (*dorea*) as proceeding out of the grace of Christ, which itself looks back to the grace of God. Thus it is likely that the former *gift* has reference to the gracious action of Christ as contrasted with Adam's transgression, while the latter *gift* refers to the result of Christ's action, namely the righteous status and life granted to "the many."

But because both the act and consequence of the last Adam are defined by grace, they are infinitely superior to those of the first Adam. This is most particularly evident in the fact that Christ's act and its consequence serve to *overcome* and *undo* the consequence of Adam's action. Christ's "one act of righteousness" was not only an act of abounding grace, it was triumphal in its effect. *Whereas the death that came through Adam's transgression is universal, it is not ultimate.* It has been overcome by the triumphal gift of righteousness flowing from the grace of Christ's cross in accordance with the superabundant grace of God.

Douglas Moo provides a succinct summary observation in his commentary:

*"Condemnation through Adam is inescapable, and Paul says nothing that would diminish the horrible reality of this judgment under which all people stand. But alongside condemnation there is the grace of God. And since it is precisely God's grace with which we have to do, there is an 'abounding plus,' a superabundance connected with God's gift in Christ that has the power not only to cancel the effects of Adam's work but to create, positively, life and peace. Adam's 'trespass' is the quintessence of human **activity**, an act for which a strict accounting must be due (cf. 4:1-6); but Christ's act is precisely a 'gift,' a matter of God's initiative, of his 'unmerited favor' in which people are passive, and which can, accordingly, never be earned, but only 'received' (cf. v. 17)." (emphasis in original)*

- b. Paul's second correlation is also by way of differing contrast (5:16-17). Once again his point of departure is "the gift" associated with the act of the last Adam. But in the present passage this gift is contrasted with an unspecified result that came through Adam's sin. In Greek Paul's opening clause literally reads: *And the gift is not like through the one who sinned.* For this reason the NASB provides the predicate *that*, and makes the last part of Paul's statement a relative clause modifying his unspecified predicate.

Given the nature of the contrast and the succeeding explanatory clause, it is apparent that Paul intended as his unspoken predicate the judgment that resulted from Adam's trespass: "*For on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification*" (5:16b). In his opening clause he was contrasting the "gift" - which he indicates as arising from many transgressions - with something that came through Adam's one transgression. The parallelism of 5:16b points to *judgment* as being that thing.

This being the case, the contrast of 5:16 is seen to be two-fold: it is first between the results of Adam's and Christ's determining acts, and second between the number of offenses associated with each result.

- With respect to the former, the result of Adam's one act was judgment resulting in condemnation, whereas the result of Christ's one act was the free gift of righteousness (cf. 5:17b) resulting in justification.
- The second contrast ties judgment and condemnation to Adam's *one* transgression, but the gift of righteousness and justification to *many* transgressions. Throughout this context Paul attributes righteousness and justification to the *one act* of Christ, and it is important to note that he was not here departing from that conviction. For his present concern was not with the relationship of justification to Christ, but its relationship to those who participate in it. The gift of righteousness and its resultant justification come to men in the context of countless transgressions, both personally and collectively.

Thus Paul's point: Adam's one transgression brought judgment and condemnation to himself and all connected to him. His single act had the catastrophic effect of bringing defilement, estrangement, and condemnation upon the whole human race. It was this circumstance of universal, limitless offense that the gift of the one Man addressed and rectified: "*As through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men*" (5:18). The desolation of humanity in the first Adam was restored in the last Adam.

Rather than immediately moving on to his third point of correlation between Adam and Christ, verse 5:17 provides a continuation of the previous verse by elaborating on the contrast presented in it. It serves further to express in a slightly different fashion the argumentation and language of 5:15. In this way it acts to summarize and bring together Paul's statements to this point in the context. Specifically, Paul here addressed the condemnation that came through Adam and the justification that is in Christ in terms of the foundational principles of *death* and *life*. And by referring to them in relation to the principle of rule or *dominion*, Paul expressed the important biblical truth that life and death effectively define the two eras with which they are associated.

But though there is a reign associated with both death and life and the ages they pertain to, there is a crucial difference. For the result of Adam's determining transgression was an age defined by *death's* tyrannical reign; in contrast the new age in Christ is defined by the reign of *men* who have received God's grace and the gift of righteousness.

- The human estrangement that is "death" assumed the place of sole dominion following the first man's trespass for the simple reason that it held ultimate sway over every person (cf. Genesis 6:1-7; Isaiah 59:1-16a).
- But because death has now been conquered by life, those who enter into this life are able to exercise the dominion for which they were created. Having been reconciled to God, they are now able to live authentic human lives in the power of Christ's life as divine image-bearers (5:10, 6:1-11; cf. John 11:25-26). They are renewed to authentic humanity in the One who is True Man, which renewal will find its consummation in the perfected "life" that is the final resurrection (8:12-25). Thus Paul's declaration that such ones "*will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.*"

Another important difference in these two reigns is that death's universal reign came about entirely apart from the *personal involvement* of Adam's descendents. All have been brought under death's dominion without any personal intention or determination. But the gift of righteousness and the consequent reign in life come to men through *receiving* God's grace in Christ (5:17b). While the reckoning of Christ's righteousness stands upon divine determination - it is a gift of grace - it is appropriated *through personal faith*. And so, whereas the "all" (or "many") that died in Adam extends to the whole human race, the "all" or "many" that live in Christ consists of those "*who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness.*" It is those who receive the last Adam in faith that are given the right to become children of God; children not in name, word, or heritage, but in truth by the transforming power of God (John 1:9-13, 6:35, 7:37-39, 11:25-26).

- c. As noted previously, the third and fourth correspondences are formed around positive contrasts rather than negative ones. Verse 5:18 is the first of the final two, and many commentators regard it as being the point of Paul's reengagement of the comparison he initiated in 5:12. The reason is that he here returned to the same sort of simple comparison introduced in his opening statement. Whether this conclusion is correct or not, his introductory conjunctions ("so then") make it clear that Paul's intention in this verse was to introduce the summary to the entire context of 5:12-21. After all that has been said and all the nuances of correlation and contrast that have been developed, the thrust of the typological relation between Adam and Christ is very simple and straightforward:

"As through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men."

This statement has proven problematic for many, specifically because, on the face of it, it appears to indicate that Christ's death has accomplished the justification of every person.

- Thus it is used by *universalists* who wish to uphold the conviction that, in the end, all men will be saved.
- Others cite it in support of a *universal justification*. Some view this justification of all people as being only potential, while others regard it as actual. Either way, those in this group who are not universalists maintain that it is the personal reception of this justification that makes it effectual for any given person. This argument is often expressed in terms of God's justice having been satisfied with respect to every person, but unless one is *willing to accept* that he is right with God, he will die unjustified.
- Calvinists, on the other hand, are quick to point out all the verses and theological arguments that constrain justification to the elect. In the present context they note that the justified "all" are those who are given grace and the gift of righteousness (although they may wish to minimize the "receiving" aspect associated with it).

But each of these views misses Paul's fundamental point. For his concern in this passage was not so much with the individual as with *mankind* as a whole. Paul was not denying personal election, nor was he teaching the doctrine of universalism. But he was not here addressing the fate of the individual; he was speaking in *redemptive-historical categories*. His concern was first with Adam as the head of the former age, and especially the impact of his one transgression in inaugurating the "dead" and condemned condition of the entire created order over which he presided as *lord*. Yet, in these things Adam was but a type who anticipated another Head whose one act of righteousness would undo his calamity and bring life, renewal and reconciliation to the entire created order, including fallen humanity. This is the reason for Paul's use of global categories in this context; he wasn't addressing individual persons as much as the typological relation between the two "Adams" and their determining acts with respect to mankind (ref. Ephesians 1:7-10; Colossians 1:19-20; etc.).

Therefore, to view Paul's statement in 5:18 as indicating a potential justification, or even an actual justification that may somehow fail to effectively justify, is to obscure his meaning. For as surely as Adam's one transgression brought the condemnation of death to all under his headship, so also Christ's one act of righteousness - His atoning death at Calvary - has brought justification of life to all under His headship (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:20-23; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 9:11-14; 1 Peter 2:24; etc.). Paul entered this context having insisted that the believer exults in a hope that can never disappoint, and it is precisely his full, secure justification by the gracious gift of Christ's righteousness that substantiates Paul's insistence.

- d. Finally, verse 5:19 presents Paul's fourth point of correspondence between Adam and Christ, which is essentially a restating of the truth of 5:18. However, it does introduce an important nuance to his argument, which is that the contrasting consequences resulting from the respective actions of the two "Adams" represent settled, permanent conditions or *constitutions*. As Adam's disobedience resulted in the many being constituted sinners, so also Christ's obedience resulted in the many being constituted righteous (both now and in the consummation to come).

This observation is important, for it shows that Adam's transgression - here called his act of disobedience - brought all of his descendents into a state of being sinners. It is not merely that they share in his sin through the principle of representation; they also share in his unrighteous status, on account of which he was rightly regarded by God as a **sinner**. *As has been the case throughout the context, the importance of this truth to Paul's argument is revealed when it is transposed to the second Adam.* For as much as Adam's disobedience rendered all men truly sinners in the estimation of God, so also Christ's obedience renders those under His headship truly righteous before God.

But the sense in which Paul was speaking must not be misconstrued. His contention was not that Christ's obedience makes men righteous *in themselves*, or that it provides a foundation and resource with which they can now begin to live a righteous life; *their being rendered righteous refers to a change of status before God, not a change in personal uprightness*. The person joined to the second Adam is not constituted righteous in that he is morally transformed; his righteous constitution speaks to the transformation of his relationship with God. Far from being godly himself, the believer's justification reflects his faith in the God who justifies the *ungodly* and thereby reconciles them to Himself (4:4-5).

As Paul previously insisted that the gospel of justification by faith secures the Christian in confident hope (5:1-11), so he has here elaborated on this grand reality by establishing and explaining the typological relationship between Adam and Christ. Douglas Moo well summarizes this context and shows its marvelous contribution to the believer's exultant hope; a hope maintained in the firm assurance that it will never disappoint:

*"...people actually become sinners in solidarity with Adam - by God's decision; people actually become 'righteous' in solidarity with Christ - again, by God's decision. But there is one important difference, plainly hinted at in the emphasis on 'grace' throughout vv-15-17: while our solidarity with Adam in condemnation is due to our solidarity with him in 'sinning,' our solidarity with Christ in righteousness is **not** because we have acted righteously in and with Christ. While Rom. 6 suggests that we were in some sense 'in Christ' when he 'obeyed even unto death,' that obedience is never accounted to us as our own. In other words, while we **deserve** condemnation - for 'all have sinned' - we are **freely given** righteousness and life. It is this gratuitous element on the side of Christ's work that enables Paul to celebrate the 'how much more' of our 'reigning' in life (v. 17) and that gives to every believer absolute assurance for the life to come."*
(emphasis in original)