

# Jot & Tittle

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## **Romans 5 (Part 5)**

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The fifth chapter of Romans is a theological treasure trove, especially when it comes to the doctrines of sin and salvation. The first part of the chapter, verses 1-11, concentrate on peace with God through justification by faith. The second part, Romans 5:12-21, points the spotlight on eternal life as the outcome of justification by faith with an emphasis on the contrast between spiritual death and spiritual life. This article will examine Romans 5:15-17. Building on the comparison between Adam and Jesus Christ in the preceding verses, this section further emphasizes the contrast between the way of Adam and the way of Christ. This contrast between Adam and Jesus Christ serves to heighten our awareness of the extent of God's grace. Paul presents these contrasts in order to help us understand the gracious gift of justification by faith.

***Sin versus grace—in contrast to Adam's trespass stands the abundant gift of grace through Jesus Christ (5:15).***

Adam's trespass stands in contrast to Jesus' gift of grace. "Verse 15 begins with a 'but' because Paul is now qualifying the

typological relationship between Adam and Christ he enunciated in v. 14b."<sup>1</sup> Adam's trespass brought death to "many," a term Paul here uses to imply in subtle terms the totality of the human race. "'The many' refers simply to a great number; how inclusive that number might be can be determined only by context. In the protasis of this verse, 'the many' clearly includes all people; for Paul has already said that 'all died' with reference to the sin of Adam (v. 12)."<sup>2</sup> In contrast, God's grace is far greater. This gift of grace came through one man, Jesus Christ, and overflows to "many." "But in the apodosis ('how much more . . .') 'the many' must be qualified by Paul's insistence in v. 17 that only those who 'receive' the gift benefit from Christ's act."<sup>3</sup>

The whole world has access to God's grace, and many people have entered into that grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This use of "many" may even imply that a majority of the human race will enjoy the blessings of God's saving grace. "'The many' can by no means denote a minority . . ."<sup>4</sup> However, this conclusion is not certain and the "many" who receive the gift of God's grace may simply refer to a significant number of people without demanding a numerical majority.

***Condemnation versus justification—in contrast to Adam's single trespass and consequent condemnation stands the justification for many trespasses through Jesus Christ (5:16).***

Our condemnation in Adam likewise stands in opposition to our justification in Jesus Christ. "The words are almost identical with those which introduced the previous verse. But now the emphasis is on the consequence of each action."<sup>5</sup> God's gift counteracts the effects of Adam's sin. Adam sinned once, at least his initial trespass was a single event, and that one sin brought condemnation to the entire human race. But the free gift of God works against many—countless—trespasses and yields justification.

“Through the one disobedient act of the primal sinner sentence of condemnation was passed; but the ‘free gift’ . . . bestowed after the commission of many sins, issues in God’s reversal of that adverse judgment and his conferment of a righteous status on many sinners.”<sup>6</sup> Through faith in Jesus Christ and His redemptive work, His gift, we are declared righteous, no longer under condemnation.

***Death versus life—in contrast to Adam’s introduction of the reign of death stands the reign of life for those who receive the abundant gift of grace through Jesus Christ (5:17).***

The single transgression of one man, Adam, introduced the reign of death. But in a much greater way the redeeming work of one man, Jesus, introduced the reign of life. “In fact, v. 17 is the summary and climax of Paul’s delineation of the contrasting effects of the parallel redemptive-historical acts of the two ‘men.’”<sup>7</sup> Paul here bundles together such significant terms as “grace,” “gift,” “righteousness,” and “life.” These are “abundant” in Jesus Christ. “The words *how much more*, together with the reference to *God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness*, alert us to expect a greater blessing.”<sup>8</sup> Where death reigned, now life reigns! However, Paul doesn’t imply that there’s a universal salvation. This gift of life is given to those who “receive” it, responding by faith. Justification by faith is still Paul’s theme. We pass from death to life through faith in Jesus Christ. “The reign of life . . . is experienced through choice and personal decision; it is for those who ‘receive’ the gift. The importance of this qualification can hardly be overemphasized.”<sup>9</sup> It’s obvious, then, that the way of Adam stands in stark contrast to the way of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 334-335.

<sup>2</sup> Moo, 336.

<sup>3</sup> Moo, 336.

<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 135.

<sup>5</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 155.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce, 135.

<sup>7</sup> Moo, 339.

<sup>8</sup> Stott, 155.

<sup>9</sup> Moo, 340.