

“A TALE OF TWO MEN AND THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST” PT. 3
ROMANS 5:15-17

I suppose that I was 10 or 11 when my 4- or 5-year-old brother introduced me to the following lyrics:

One of these things is not like the others
One of these things just doesn't belong
Can you tell which thing is not like the others
By the time I finish my song?

Did you guess which thing was not like the others?
Did you guess which thing just doesn't belong?
If you guessed this one is not like the others
Then you're absolutely...right!

And accompanying the song would always be some kind of image with three identical objects and one dissimilar object: the cookie monster with three plates containing two cookies and one plate with three cookies (I think they all ended up with no cookies); three lower-case letter r and one upper-case R; three saws and one shoe; three children right-side up and one child upside-down; three fireman's hats and one party hat; three sets of glasses and one beanie hat.



The song and images were designed to make observations and cultivate discernment; what's the same and what's different and why?

In the passage before us in Romans 5, Paul engages in a more sophisticated argument of “one of these things is not like the other,” when he compares Adam and Jesus. No two men have ever exerted a greater or more extensive influence over mankind than these two men — one for ill and one for good.

In these verses, Paul says that,

CHRIST IS GREATER THAN ADAM BECAUSE WHAT ADAM LOST IN DISOBEDIENCE, CHRIST SUPERSEDED IN OBEDIENCE.

In amplifying that theme, these verses offer two primary reasons why Christ is greater than Adam —

1. Christ is Greater Than Adam because of GRACE (v. 15)

- ✓ Adam's disobedience produced DEATH (v. 15a)
- ✓ Christ's obedience produced the FREE GIFT (v. 15b)

2. Christ is Greater Than Adam because of POWER (vv. 16-17)

- ✓ Adam's disobedience brought JUDGMENT and CONDEMNATION (v. 16a)
- ✓ Adam's disobedience brought in the reign of DEATH (v. 17a)
- ✓ Christ's obedience brought JUSTIFICATION (v. 16b)
- ✓ Christ's obedience brought in the reign of LIFE (v. 17b)

CONTEXT: Verses 15-21 flow out of the final statement Paul makes in v. 14 — that *Adam is a type of Him who is to come* (Christ).

- ✓ When Paul says that Adam is a **type** of Christ he means that there is a parallel relationship between Adam and Christ; there is a unique similarity between them.
- ✓ The word **type** refers to OT people, institutions (like the Tabernacle), or events (like the wilderness wandering) that God used to indicate a NT parallel in either Christ or some institution or event that emanates from Christ. And here Adam is indicated as a type of Christ.
- ✓ But there is only one point of *similarity* between Adam as a type of Christ — the action of Adam affected all people who are in him (all mankind) just as the action of Christ affects all those who are in Him. Adam is the representative of all mankind; and Christ is the representative of all who believe in Him. They both have universal impact over their followers.
- ✓ And in these verses (15-21) Paul will identify many ways that Adam and Christ are *dissimilar* (and as he does that he demonstrates the supremacy of Christ).
- ✓ And in these three verses, Paul points particularly to the supremacy of Christ by twice noting that what Christ did **is not like** what Adam did and Christ's work is **much more** than Adam's work. With these phrases in vv. 15 and 16, he points out that —
 - Christ is greater than Adam in degree — because grace is greater than sin
 - Christ is greater than Adam in power — because life has overwhelmed death

1. Christ is Greater Than Adam because of **GRACE** (v. 15)

• Adam's disobedience produced **DEATH** (v. 15a)

- ✓ Paul has asserted that Adam is a type of Christ (v. 14), but then he immediately cautions his readers not to make a wrong conclusion about that statement: **the free gift** (of justification) **is not like the transgression**.
- ✓ The word **transgression** is the third different word that Paul has used for sin in this section; it refers to a "false step," or "falling away" — a movement away from righteousness and truth. What is significant here is not its particular meaning, but that it is in contrast to the **free gift**.
- ✓ And **transgression** is different from God's gift of grace in that it produced **death**.
 - Specifically, Paul says, **the many died**. From one man's sin, **many died**. And when Paul says "many," he means...all (v. 12). Through Adam's sin, death is introduced into the world and death comes to all men. No one escapes death; death is "one out of one." As one says, "Condemnation through Adam is inescapable." [Moo, 367] In vv. 14, 17, Paul says that **death reigned**. Death was master over all men.

"I can say without fear of contradiction, that no matter who you are, there's a lot of death in your future. You're getting older. Either you'll face death yourself or you'll live a long time and face the deaths of those around you." [Tim Keller, *O Love That Will Not Let Me Go*, 87.]

➤ And the worst part of this death is that it included spiritual death, as we noted previously.

Death is the spiritual separation between man and God that produces eternal condemnation for those who do not repent (6:21-23 — note the contrast between eternal life and death).

- ✓ No man had greater advantage than Adam; he was created sinless and he knew perfection and he knew what it was to live in full harmony with God. And he sinned, and *nothing* has been the same since then. As great as Adam was, the end product of his life was death — for all men.
- ✓ In contrast to Adam is "the second Adam," Jesus Christ —

- Christ's obedience produced the **FREE GIFT** (v. 15b)

- ✓ Paul says that while death spread to all men through Adam's sin, something ***much more*** came through Christ. So, while death was universal and powerful, it was not the final word. Something not only superseded death from Adam's sin; something overwhelmed death. Christ not only canceled the effect of Adam's sin, but "He provided more than what Adam lost or even possessed before the Fall, namely: the righteousness of God!" [Constable]
- ✓ Unlike Adam, there was no transgression from Christ or in Christ (He did not sin and He could not sin). What was in Christ was only obedience and by that obedience came a ***free gift*** and ***grace*** (notice that Paul mentions both grace and gift twice in this verse).
 - The word ***free gift*** is more literally, "grace gift" and in the NT it always refers to gifts that believers receive from God; and here it emphasizes that "Christ is more powerful to save than Adam was to destroy." [Calvin] God's grace is always greater than man's sin.
 - And the word ***grace*** refers to unmerited favor. It is a manifestation of God's pity on mankind, giving us what we do not deserve and withholding what we do deserve.
 - And notice that the gift comes from ***the One Man, Jesus Christ***. Here Paul is emphasizing the humanity of Christ — Adam could be a type of Christ because they were both authentically men, and Christ could supersede the actions of Adam because they were both authentically men. It took the incarnate God to atone for Adam's sin.
 - And this gift ***abounds to the many*** — that is, it is not for all men (as "the many" meant at the beginning of the verse), but it is only for those who are justified (v. 16b) — and justification is only for those who have faith in Christ (3:28; 4:5). And for those who believe, the grace of God is superabundant. In His abounding grace, God has reversed the consequences of Adam's sin and has given us a righteousness that even Adam did not possess.
- ✓ The gift surpasses the sin. This is the amazing news of the gospel and it is the declaration that Christ is infinitely greater than Adam and Christ's gift is infinitely greater than Adam's demerit.
- ✓ What will we say about Christ and Adam and sin and righteousness? Christ's grace greater:

“...the power of sin, which is death, can be broken, but the power of Christ, which is salvation, cannot be broken....Jesus Christ broke the power of sin and death, but the converse is not true. Sin and death cannot break the power of Jesus Christ. The condemnation of Adam’s sin is reversible, the redemption of Jesus Christ is not. The effect of Adam’s act is permanent only if not nullified by Christ. The effect of Christ’s act, however, is permanent for believing individuals and not subject to reversal or nullification. We have the great assurance that once we are in Jesus Christ, we are in Him forever.” [MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, 304.]

2. Christ is Greater Than Adam because of **POWER** (vv. 16-17)

- Adam’s disobedience brought **JUDGMENT** and **CONDEMNATION** (v. 16a)

- ✓ Paul again uses the **not like...much more** contrast to indicate how Christ is greater than Adam, even though Adam is a type of Christ.
- ✓ And again he emphasizes that Adam **sinned**...and through that **transgression** (note that he uses the terms synonymously), **judgment arose**. The word **judgment** refers to the judicial verdict of guilt and the subsequent punishment that comes from that verdict.
 - This certainly refers to the judgment that Adam himself faced for his sin (Gen. 3).
 - But it is also a reference to the judgment that because Adam was the federal head of all men, all men are born with original (indwelling) sin. We are under the judgment of God from birth (Eph. 2:1-3).
- ✓ And this judgment came from...**one...sin**. One sin. There was no overlooking that first sin (“if at first you don’t succeed...”). One sin introduced sin into the world permanently. The problem was not that Adam’s sin was so much worse than any other sin that would ever be committed; the problem with Adam’s sin is that it was sin. It was rebellion against God and an attempt to usurp God’s throne from Him, and in that way, it was *just like every other sin that has ever been committed*. This reveals the hatred of God for sin. (And when we understand that hatred, it should be an impetus to us not to trifle with sin. There is nothing inconsequential about sin. Sin always renders the sinner guilty before God and under His judgment.)
- ✓ I said it last time: no good ever directly comes from sin. Sin always only produces hardship, sorrow, grief, pain, suffering, and death. And that leads to the next consequence of Adam’s sin...
- ✓ The verdict of God’s judgment was **condemnation**. That is, God not only pronounces the sinner guilty, but he carries out the consequences of His punishment for that sin.
- ✓ And the wages of sin is...death (which leads to the next consequence):

- Adam’s disobedience brought in the reign of **DEATH** (v. 17a)

- ✓ There is one man and one transgression and through that one sin, **death reigned**. Quite simply, “death is the ruler...death is king.” Death exercises authority over all men; none can escape its clutches and power. Sinful desires reign (6:12), sin reigns (5:21a), and death reigns (vv. 14, 17).

- ✓ What Paul says is similar to what James says — **Js. 1:14-16**. There is a desire for sin, that desire produces sin, and that sin always leads only to death. And no man should ever be deceived about that (Js. 1:16). Sin is by nature deadly and can only produce death.
- ✓ We can agree that, “the world is a place of cemeteries.” [Lloyd-Jones] Sin is ruinous and lifeless.
- ✓ I have seen Raye Jeanne and Emily’s pictures from their trip to Houston two weeks ago. And it’s overwhelming the devastation that was wrought. Houses completely gutted of every belonging. Every possession that was touched by the flood waters sat in the front yards of the homeowners waiting to be picked up to be hauled to the dump. Houses filled with sewage and human waste. Every inch of the house contaminated by the foul water. One woman said to a group, “my dining room table isn’t in too bad a shape; I think I’ll just strip it and refinish it so I can keep it.” And a man responded, “It has been sitting in waste water for two weeks; you’ll never get it out. It will always be infected and it will never be safe to use. Discard it.” This is our life with sin. It is deadly and can only produce death.
- ✓ And into that sorrowful circumstance, Paul again steps with the words, ***much more*** (v. 17), demonstrating the greatness of Christ —

- Christ’s obedience brought **JUSTIFICATION** (v. 16b)

- ✓ Sin is deadly. But the gift of grace is not like the curse of sin. ***But on the other hand***, Christ intervened with the ***free gift***.
- ✓ Notice the contrasts between Adam and Christ —
 - There was one sin of Adam, but a lifetime of obedience by Christ (Christ’s obedience is not expressly stated here, but certainly implied, for there is no righteousness to impute if He was not righteous on our behalf, **Mt. 5:17**).
 - There was condemnation for all from one sin, but there was one gift of grace from many sins
 - ... The massive number of sins that flowed from Adam’s one sin would seem to be a hindrance to God being gracious to us. If one sin resulted in worldwide condemnation, what would worldwide sin produce?
 - ... Yet the worldwide sin produced the compassion of God and the grace of God. It was for the very reason that we were in a helpless position that He was moved to help us. This grace will lead to what Paul says in **5:20-21**.
 - There was condemnation from God for sin, but justification from God for those who have faith.
 - ... ***Justification*** is the end result of God’s grace; in justification, the declaration of guilt is removed, the penalty of sin is taken away, and the sinner is given a new status before God, who now treats him as if he has done all that Christ did in righteousness.
 - ... And this justification not only atoned for the imputed sin that we receive from Adam (our indwelling or original sin), but it also atoned for our actual and real sins that we commit. In every way the sinner is completely cleansed of his sin by the Second Adam.
 - ... “What people did was to rebel; what God did was to restore.” [Mounce]

- ✓ Just how is Christ superior to Adam? In Christ there is justification while in Adam there was only death, judgment, and condemnation.
- ✓ And Paul now points to one final way in which Christ is superior to Adam —

- Christ's obedience brought in the reign of **LIFE** (v. 17b)

- ✓ Here again Paul uses the phrase, ***much more***. The gift of God surpasses the sin of man. God “delights much more in showing mercy and pardon than in giving just punishment.” (Lightfoot)
- ✓ For the believer, there is ***abundance of grace***. That is, the grace that God gives is not barely adequate, but is overflowing and super-abounding. It is lavish (Jn. 1:16). You cannot out-sin God's grace (5:21). Sin is finite, but God's grace is infinite.
- ✓ And with the gift of righteousness these ***will reign in life***. What sin has taken away in death, God will restore in life. Adam's sin produced death, but Christ's righteousness overwhelmed death with eternal life.
 - Some commentators suggest that this reigning is talking particularly about eternity (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 22:5). And it certainly is true that is the ultimate end of our justification.
 - But it is true also that we are alive *now*. Death has already been swallowed up in victory. The believer already has life and is alive in Christ's life (6:4-11; 1 Cor. 15:56-57; Col. 1:13-14). And Paul seems clearly to be anticipating what he will say in the next paragraph. Death is dead and the life of Christ lives in the believer, now.
 - Because of this truth of Christ's obedience, we now have power over sin; sin is no longer the master, death is no longer the victor, and we are no longer victims. We who are in Christ are victorious and alive and have all we need — because the second Adam is greater than Adam.
- ✓ And notice finally that this life is only for a particular group of people — ***those who receive the abundance of grace***. They have *received* this grace (and have not merited or earned it). They are recipients of divine grace. And how have they received it? Through faith (3:28; 4:5, 22-25).
 - If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, this is your joy and hope. You *have* grace and because you have grace, you have justification and life. You are in Christ and you cannot be removed from Him. This is what the Second Adam has done for you.
 - If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, and if you still hold onto your sin and if you are unwilling to repent and turn away from your sin, then this is not what you have. Instead of life you have death. Instead of justification you have condemnation. You are under the sentence of God and you are utterly hopeless. Unless you repent and give up your sin and turn to loving and following (obeying) Christ. That is your only hope, and so I urge you to confess your sin as sin, repent and turn away from that sin, and turn to Christ and loving Him above all else.

CONCLUSION:

- Comparing the two most influential men in the world's history, Christ is infinitely greater than Adam:
 - ✓ As Adam disobeyed God, so Christ obeyed God.
 - ✓ As Adam disobeyed God and lost peace with God, so Christ obeyed God and always enjoyed peace with God.
 - ✓ As Adam disobeyed God and lost peace with God for all mankind that was represented by him, so Christ obeyed God and restored peace with God for those who believe in Him.
 - ✓ And because of that, all men's hope is not in some kind of self-improvement program. Because we are in Adam, there is no self-help program that will ever be or do enough. Our hope is to be identified with Christ and have His work imputed to us and His righteousness worked in us.

And my friends, this is the source of our confidence. *All of us* are in Adam. All of us have been stained by sin in every part of our being: our wills, emotions, desires, consciences, and actions. And all of us bear the judgment and eternal condemnation of that identification with Adam from the moment we are born; and then we all quickly affirm by our actions that we are worthy of that judgment and condemnation because of our own sins.

But that is not the end of the story. Because Christ is not like Adam. One of these two people is not like the other. Because Christ obeyed where Adam disobeyed, because Christ was righteous where Adam was unrighteous, because Christ was the sin-bearer and not the sin-transmitter, because Christ pleased God where Adam displeased God, because Christ was eternal where Adam was created, Christ can then impute His righteousness to those who are unrighteous when they believe in Him.

Christ has overturned and overthrown everything that Adam introduced into the world. And if you are in Christ, all that He has done is yours, if you believe in Him: righteousness instead of transgression, grace instead of judgment, and life instead of death. This is our hope — our only hope. This is why we believe Christ — because all this is available only to those who have faith in Christ as the justifier of men (3:28).

And this is why we remember Christ as we come to the communion table.

BENEDICTION: Romans 11:33-36