

Romans 5:15-17

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Are You in Adam or Are You in Christ?

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

Some people ask, "Was it a just act by God to condemn all mankind when Adam sinned?" I want to make sure you hear my heart. YES, it was just. YES it was wise. And YES it was a very gracious thing that God did to condemn all mankind in Adam.

You may say, "I don't understand that." You see, we weren't made like God. We were made in His image, but we were not made "gods." There is a huge difference there. Adam was made with a conditional righteousness. In other words, if Adam had not sinned, it would have gone along a little further, and God would have tested every human being individually. We would have all ended up the same way, disobedient. Because you see, man was not God. He was not inherently righteous. He had a conditional righteousness.

But even more important, by condemning the human race in one man, God opened the door for His plan of redemption to deliver the human race through another man—the God Man, Jesus Christ. Each of us is born into Adam, as we have talked about, but oh, the glorious hope that we have! There is a redemption plan that we can be born again and be placed into Christ, taken out of the family of Adam and put into the family of Christ.

[2 Cor 5:17](#) says it so clearly:

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

A brand new creation. The only hope man has is to be born from above, to be made a new creation.

There are two words for "new" in the Greek. One is [neos](#) and it means new in the same manner. Say for instance I got another bicycle. I'm going to keep the old one, but I got another bicycle, and we called it a new bicycle. It really wouldn't be new in one sense of the word because I already had one. But the word used here is [kainos](#). It's the word that means different than you've ever seen before. It's the word for new covenant. It's the word for new testament. Something brand new takes place in my life. I am birthed now of the Spirit. There is something brand new. I have been made righteous in Jesus Christ. He now becomes my righteousness. I am totally changed from within, and it is going to show up on the outside. Whereas once I was in Adam, now I have been placed into Christ. So we see the glorious hope and plan that God has for redemption.

The question we have been asking as we go through this is, "Are you in Adam or are you in Christ?" That is the question you have to ask. It doesn't matter how good you think you are. It doesn't matter how many nice things you have done for people. It doesn't matter how much money you have given to the church or whatever. It does not matter! What matters is, "Have you been born from above? Have you been justified? Have you been made righteous or reckoned righteous by putting your faith into Jesus Christ?"

In verses 15-17 Paul begins to pick this up. It is very easy to figure out what Adam did. Being self-centered and selfish, he decided he wanted to be like God, and therefore, he chose to sin. He made a conscious choice to sin. As a result, death was imputed to the whole human race. Spiritual death, physical death, mental death. He sinned selfishly, unrighteously, and for that reason imputed death to all men.

So when you talk about the contrast of what Christ did and what Adam did, you are really just talking about what Christ did because it's so easy to understand what Adam did. It will take us until Jesus comes again to fully grasp everything He has done for mankind by dying on the cross and by paying for our sin.

As we get into it then, let's look at Christ as we contrast Him with Adam. First of all, I want you to see in verse 15 the power of what Christ did. He broke the power of sin and death. Remember THE sin and THE death? He broke the power of it. This is exciting! What He did affected human kind. He had to have been a man! He broke the chain and He made it possible now for a brand new creation to take place, to get man out of his dilemma and to get him into what we call salvation and what He calls salvation.

Look at verse 15

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.

Let's work our way through that verse. First of all he says, "But the free gift is not like the transgression." You are going to see the word "gift" come up several times, but there is a different word almost each time it is used. Paul is showing us a different aspect of the gift.

The word "[free gift](#)" there is the word **charisma**. It comes from the word charis, (click definition of charis) which means **grace**. Now when you put the little ending "**-ma**" onto the end of the word charis it means the result of grace. It is obviously pointing to the gift but it is more than that. It is pointing to the divine character of God who gave the gift. You've got to understand that grace is God's unmerited favor. Grace is God's transforming power. God stepped into the scene and gave such a gift to mankind, who was born in Adam. Adam was depraved, and man is a sinner, ungodly and an enemy of Him. When you understand that you begin to see the gracious love of the Father whom we believe in.

So the word here does not necessarily look at the gift as much as it does the character of the One who gave it, the attitude with which He gave it. The result of the grace is the gift, and the gift is that we can be justified from our sin, that we can be reckoned righteous and acceptable to God. That's the gift! What Jesus did on the cross was an act of grace that causes the gift to be ours. You are going to see this a little bit more as we go on.

He says this free gift, signifying the way it is given and the giver, is not like the transgression. The word "**is not**" is the word [ouk](#). It means absolutely in no way, shape, or form is it like the transgression. What God has done for us is no way, shape or form like what Adam did for us! God committed a righteous act, and by His righteous, selfless act caused all men to be able to be justified. Adam committed a sinful, selfish act and as a result imposed death upon all human kind. So when you put the two together, one stands out. We need to praise Him. He's the One who did what He did, not in any way like the transgression. **THE** transgression points back to the sin of Adam.

It goes on to say in verse 15,

"For if by THE transgression of the one the many died,"

One more time he states what he says in chapter 12. It all happened when one man sinned. He says that many died. What did he mean by "many died"? ALL men died when Adam sinned!

To contrast that, he says the **free gift** is not like the **transgression**. It is not in any way like the transgression. What it does for man is radically different. How it effects man is completely different. It says in verse 15, "**much more**" which means to a much greater degree.

I wish I could illustrate it. Suppose you had that great jockey William Shoemaker standing right beside basketball superstar Michael Jordan. Now, looking at them, you might say that Michael Jordan was MUCH MORE than William Shoemaker! You would be trying to describe something that is much, much bigger. This is even much greater than that. Paul is talking about how MUCH MORE the grace that God showed to us affected humanity than the one man's sin that imposed death upon all men.

MUCH MORE the grace of God. The word grace here **is** the word charis. It is actual grace itself. We have seen charisma, which is the result of that grace. Now we are seeing the very character itself, that undeserved favor that is shown to man. This is God loving man when man has spit in God's face. This is God loving man when man wants nothing to do with God. It shows again the character of the One who is doing the acting here. It says the grace of God. Usually when the word "God" has a definite article, it is referring to God the Father. It appears to me what he is doing here is pointing to the character of God the Father. But not only God the Father and the grace that He shows, but Christ the Son and the grace that He shows as He comes to die on the cross.

He goes on to say,

"much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many"

That word **abound** pops up again and again. It means that it is always plentiful. There is always plenty of grace. It abounds to mankind.

What is **the gift** we are talking about? Verses 16 and 17 clearly point to what the gift is. The gift in verse 16 is **justification**, and the gift in verse 17 is **righteousness**. Look at the last part of verse 16, speaking of the gift:

"but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions."

In other words, my acquittal from my sin by Jesus coming to die on a cross and by my putting my faith into Him, the result of that is that I can be justified, is the gift that God gives me.

The last part of verse 17 says,

"the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ"

Oh, how much more could He affect you and me? He broke the power of Adam's sin.

To understand why justification is in verse 16 and righteousness is in verse 17 is pretty clear. We have been trying to show you that they are two sides of the same coin. A man has to be justified, acquitted of his guilt, before he can become righteous or acceptable to God. Christ **is** our righteousness. He comes to live in us. And when He does He sustains us and makes us righteous and acceptable before God. So, they are two sides of the same coin. This is a wonderful gift! Jesus came to break the power of this penalty that was imposed upon all mankind, to take that penalty away and to deliver us from the penalty of sin. This is the beautiful picture. "Much more!" it says. To a higher and greater degree did His grace abound, which means there is so much more than we even understand.

It goes to everyone. Did it affect the same group that Adam affected? We don't want to preach universal salvation. That is not what Paul is doing. He is not saying that because Adam sinned and every man whether he was born at that time or not sinned in him and now that Christ has come and died for us, it is for all men, regardless. The way man appropriates that in his life is by putting his faith into the Lord Jesus Christ. He has to come to terms with surrender. So it is different than the transgression. It is there, and it affects man much more, but it is appropriated in a different way. Man only receives what Christ has done by faith. That's how he enters into the grace which God has given. That's so different, radically different, from the transgression.

It broke the power of Adam's sin. What's the difference in what Adam did and what Christ did? What Adam did can be broken! The penalty of sin, the penalty of death can be broken. Who broke it? A Man: the God Man, Jesus Christ. When we put our faith into Him that breaks its power, it breaks that consequence. There is no more inward nature to sin. Yes, we still have the tendencies of sin, but we have been changed from within. Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a brand new creation. The Holy Spirit has come to live within him. He is in Christ now, and His grace has affected him MUCH MORE than the transgression ever affected mankind. He broke the power of sin and death.

I'll tell you what. If you are still in Adam, then death still reigns over you. When you die one day, that's it! You are born once; you die twice, physically on this earth and spiritually forever without ever having another opportunity to put your faith into the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the things that has been rolling around in my mind since we started this study in Romans 5 is how many people come to church every Sunday, banking on the same false securities that the Jews banked on back in Romans 2:3-20. They are depending on the fact that they do good, the fact of their performance and their church membership. They're depending on all of this. Oh, no! What Christ did broke the power, but you have to put your faith into Him. When you put your faith into Him, that is when you are acquitted. That's when you are made acceptable before God. You are either in Adam, or you are in Christ.

Where are you? Are you in Adam, playing church? Are you in Adam, trying to make people think that you are religious enough, that you really love God, when you know in your heart that you have absolutely no surrender in your body? Well, if you are you are going to bust hell wide open. The penalty of THE death is still tagged to your life. There is not one thing you can do about it except put your faith into Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only way to the Father, the only way! When you put your faith into Him, that immediately takes you out of Adam. He broke the sin, the death and the power of the death.

There is so much more in these verses. My goodness. The more I look at Romans, the more I realize why Donald Grey Barnhouse preached his whole life in Romans and never finished! Secondly, there is the passion of what Christ did. Look at Romans 5:16:

The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation.

Notice how many times Paul keeps saying that. "The one transgression. One man sinned. One time!"

Then he says,

"but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification"

If you look closely here, you will see a tremendous picture of a passion of a loving God. It'll take a moment to work it out. It says first of all, "And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned." This time, the word charisma is also used with the little ma is on the end of it. It's the act of giving. It's the way God gave the gift. The act of giving the gift, the result of the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. Of course, the gift was justification, being made righteous.

We have seen the righteous standing we have with God in Romans 5:1; 5:2;

5:3; 5:4; 5:5. So much of this has already been covered. I don't know why I feel like I have to keep going back and reminding you of it. When we are justified and when we are made righteous, we have an eternal standing in the peace of God. Romans 5:1 says God makes peace with us. We have peace with God. Actually, it is peace towards God, eternal standing in His grace, the hope of a glorious future, the ability to bear up under suffering, to be proven in suffering, to have assurance that our hope will never disappoint. Love is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit of God. This is what happens when we are affected by what Christ did.

Paul goes back and says this gift that God has given, this act of giving, "is not like that which came through the one who sinned."

What is the difference? It says, "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." Actually it should read "arose out of" and "the many transgressions."

Wait a minute. What is Paul saying here? Here is what I think he is saying. First of all, you see the righteous character of God here. Do you know how much God hates sin? We have heard it so watered down we think we can just go on playing with sin and think God says, "Oh, its okay." We think He just sort of winks at it and lets it go.

Do you know how much God hates sin? God hates it so much that one sin condemned the whole human race. Take that one and meditate on it for a while.

"Do you mean I was wrong when I cheated on my wife and thought God just forgave me and wrote it off as if nothing ever happened."

YES, He forgave you, but do you realize how expensive that sin was to God? God hates that kind of sin. Every time we choose to live in darkness and choose not to obey Him, we need to remember that only one sin condemned the whole race. He has a perfect hatred for unrighteousness. That's a just God. He HAD to condemn man when he sinned.

But look on the flip side of that. Out of many transgressions the free gift came. He has also a perfect love for the sinners who commit those sins. I love that! He hates sin, but oh, how He loves sinners! That's why He gave us what He gave us. That is the

heart of the God we are dealing with. He's a loving, merciful, gracious, full-of-grace God who hates sin, but He loves sinners. There is beautiful balance in the character of God. There is a passion with which He hates sin. The passion even caused Jesus to be slain publicly so that all men could understand how serious sin was.

Not only that, but He had a passion for sinners. The Creator was willing to stoop to the level of the creation and take upon Himself the flesh of mankind. He BECAME flesh. He lived on this earth and paid the supreme price to redeem man from that dilemma and to raise man up and to put him into His family forever. That's the heart of God that you see in this verse.

Oh, listen! John 3:16 all of a sudden has a different ring to you:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

That's the heart of God. God knew that man would sin, but God had already planned the redemption. Jesus stood in the portals of heaven as the Lamb to be slain on this earth.

This is the answer to society's needs today. Do you understand that? We say we do, but do we really? This is what missions flows out of. This is where evangelism flows out. We are not going to have peace when the people of other nations sit down with the people of our nation and come to terms in an agreement. That's not going to be real peace. We don't want the peace the world gives. We want the peace God gives to our hearts. That's the answer to the world's dilemma. There are in Adam. No wonder they can't understand Christians. If you're in Adam your mind has been darkened, depraved. You can't understand the things of God. The natural man does not understand the things of God. It's the Spirit that teaches us these things of God. It ought to begin to fuel that passion within us of wanting everybody that we know to be gotten out of Adam and to be put into Jesus Christ.

Then finally, there is the practicality of what Christ did for us. Romans 5:17 reads,

"For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ"

We've already seen this. Paul is just recovering it. He is going someplace else with it. All those times death reigned. For a person in Adam, death reigns over him. Adam's sin resulted in a one-dimensional consequence which was death.

"For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more [There's that word again! It was to a greater and a higher degree, beyond what we yet had comprehended.] those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ"

In Adam death reigned. In Christ life reigns. We reign in that life He has given to us. The word for [life](#) is zoe. It is the essence of life. Do you realize the vitality of an individual who has had the Holy Spirit of God to come into his life? The life he has now he never had before. It makes him different. It causes him to think differently. Now he can hear from God. Now he can be energized in his spirit to do the things that he once could never do. We now will reign in the life that Christ has given to us.

[John 10:10](#) says,

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

I wonder if you understand the **much more** effect Jesus has had on you than what Adam had on you. Death, that's pretty simple. But **much more** the life that God has put in us. He didn't just change us from without. He didn't just reverse the penalty of Adam. He changed us. He made us new creations. He has done something that is on an eternal basis. He has put His Spirit within us, and His life is now within us.

Philippians tells us He is the one who granted us that life, and He is the one who will fulfill that life in us. Philippians 1:6 says,

"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (see note Philippians 1:6)

To reign in life is the **much more** effect that Jesus has had for you and me. It goes back to the first part of the chapter. Now I am able to bear up under. Now I am able to deal with all the tribulation and suffering and sorrow in this world.

Do you understand the effect God has had on your life? Maybe you don't understand the life that is within you. That doesn't mean that it is not going to be difficult on the outside, but the victory is on the inside! Did you know that victory for the Christian is not a goal? We don't work toward victory! We come from it! It's already been won in Jesus Christ. We rule and reign in His life. In other words, the moment I surrender to Him, the moment I surrender to His word, then His life in me begins to strengthen me to be and to do what I never could do before! How many Christians even understand that? We forget that in the life, He gives us power over the sin that use to plague us when we were in Adam.

We're getting ready to come into chapter 6, the victory that we have over the power of sin. Sure He has freed us from the penalty, but He had a MUCH MORE effect on us. He has changed us from within and now His life is in us and we can have victory in that life.

Are you in Adam or are you in Christ? If you are in Christ, take Ephesians, Colossians and the rest of the New Testament and find out the MUCH MORE effect that Jesus has had on you than Adam had on man when he sinned. It is incredible what we have in Jesus Christ