

# Super-Abounding Grace

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## Introduction

Within the grand theme of “justification by faith,” Paul is moving from our reconciliation and salvation to focus on a more complete understanding of what Christ accomplished for us. He is also reminding the Jews (and us!) that no one can be saved through obedience to the law.

This text is NOT saying:

1. that there is no sin or that God ignores sin between Adam and the Law of Moses;
2. that *only* the sins each individual commits make him guilty before God;
3. that Christ’s righteousness is given to us only because of Christ’s death;
4. or that that all people will be saved.<sup>1</sup>

## The Solidarity Principle

The passage uses one main comparison/contrast between Adam and Christ. Each is a representative head of humanity, but Paul wants us to see the huge differences.

### One Represents Many/All

Adam is the head of the whole human race; Christ is the head of the new humanity

An element of physicality involved but as head, Adam plunges us into a state of sin that affects the body and also stains the soul.

### Adam: Pattern of the One to Come

*With Adam is bound up the entrance of sin into the world and the reign of sin, condemnation, and death. With Christ is bound up the entrance of righteousness and the reign of grace, righteousness, justification, life. These two heads of humanity and the two parallel yet opposing complexes bound up with them are the pivots on which the history of humanity turns. God’s government of the race can be interpreted only in terms of these two headships and of the respective complexes which the heads set in operation. These are the pivots of redemptive revelation, the first as making redemption necessary, the second as accomplishing and securing redemption. (Murray, 207)*

## The One Man Adam’s One Trespass

### Genesis Is Historical

By placing such an emphasis on “the one man Adam” and by seeing the crucial nature of the “one sin” Paul is putting his New Testament stamp of agreement on the entire Genesis 3 narrative (Murray, 181). Paul believed in one original, personal man, Adam, who, with Eve, began the whole family of man. Not 10,000 Adams and Eves, as our DNA sleuths have concluded. If we lose “the one man Adam” we lose “the one man Christ”!

## In Adam, Death to the Race

### “As in Adam all die” (1 Cor 15:22)

*Sin is transgression, trespass, disobedience, and therefore solidarity in sin is involvement in the disobedience, transgression and trespass of Adam.” (Murray, 204)*

“all sinned” – Does this mean death comes because each individual sins? No:

1. Not everyone dies because they actively choose to sin (think of infants).
2. Paul says death reigns over those *who do not sin as Adam sinned*. How did Adam sin? By deliberately choosing to disobey a direct command. If everyone is guilty for direct disobedience, then they *would be sinning as Adam sinned*.
3. Our passage insists on the “one sin” of the “one man”: “By the trespass of the **one** the many died” (v 15); “the judgment was from **one** unto condemnation” (v 16); “by the trespass of the **one** death reigned through the one” (v 17); “through **one** trespass judgment came upon all unto condemnation” (v 18); “through the disobedience of the **one** man the many were constituted sinners” (v 19)

## Results of the Fall

*If the purpose of Christ’s coming was to redeem us from the calamity into which Adam had fallen, and taken all his posterity headlong with him, a clearer realization of what we possess in Christ can come only when we have been shown what we have lost in Adam. (Calvin, 111)*

- Sin and death came into the world,
- death spread to all men,
- death reigned;
- God’s judgment fell on all men;
- we were “constituted sinners”

*It is eminently germane to the whole argument of this passage that death reigned over those who did not sin after the similitude of Adam’s transgression. For the apostle is chiefly interested in demonstrating that men are justified who do not act righteously after the similitude of Christ’s obedience. (Murray, 188)*

## The Role of the Law

There are several uses of the law. You may have learned of its use as 1. A mirror, showing us our sin, 2. A constraint of evil, and 3. The revelation of what pleases God. Here Paul speaks basically about the first: its use to provoke the conscience. But Paul goes farther, saying that it may restrain evil in one sense, it often increases sin and evil, since in our fallen, rebellious nature, we *want* to disobey.

*“although it is true that from Adam to Moses sin was in the world and therefore law, ... yet in that period death reigned not only over those who were violators of expressly*

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*revealed law, as was Adam, but also over those who did not sin in that manner, that is, after the pattern of Adam.” (Murray 189-90)*

God judges people for sin in the period from Adam to Moses: Cain; the flood; Sodom; the Pharaoh and Abimelech (concerning Sarah); the plagues.

All men are conscious of good and evil. They judge others and excuse themselves...yet without the law, we become more comfortable in our sinfulness. Calvin says that without the law, men naturally lay aside the distinction between good and evil and indulge “their lusts without care or disturbance, as if there were no judgment of God.”

Our own culture has cast aside the law of God, which has been more clearly revealed to our generations than it was through Moses’ law, because we have the “mystery” of Christ revealed to us! Yet still we get comfortable in sin, having lost the distinction between good and evil. Instead of seeing the horror of our own rebellion, we are horrified by anyone who dares to warn us of God’s pending judgment.

### **The Law of Moses**

*Our condemnation is not set before us in the law for the purpose of making us continue in [a flood of sin] but to acquaint us intimately with our misery, and to lead us to Christ, who is sent to be a physician to the sick, a deliverer to the captives, a comforter to the afflicted, and a defender to the oppressed.” (Calvin, 120; see Isa 61:1)*

In one sense, the law is a temporary parenthesis. F. F. Bruce puts this quite strongly:

*The law has no permanent significance in the history of redemption. It was introduced as a temporary measure for a practical purpose. Sin was present in the world ever since Adam’s fall, but the law served the purpose of bringing sin right out into the light of day.... More than that, the law actually had the effect of increasing the amount of open sin in the world. (Bruce, 128)*

The law is powerless to save; its only power is to condemn. Paul still has in mind the Jews, who hope to find salvation through the law. (This does not mean that the law is useless. Paul applies the law to the life of the church in many instances and we still gain valued information from the law as we see it through the eyes of the inspired New Testament writers. When the parenthesis ends at the coming of Christ, we discover what the true fulfillment of the law looks like, but that is a discussion for another day.)

### **The One Man Christ’s Obedience – Superabounding Grace “so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:22)**

In all that Christ did, both in his life and in his death, he perfectly obeyed his Father’s will. Obedience in his life:

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Heb 4:15*

*I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do...I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they*

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*were and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.”...all mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. (John 17:4, 6, 10)*

Obedience in his death:

*Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:8)*

*He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his stripes we are healed.” (Isa 53:5)*

*By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous and he shall bear their iniquities. ...he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors. (Isa 53:11b, 12b)*

*The righteous life in itself would not have met their need had He not carried His obedience to the point of death...but neither would His death have met their need had the life which He thus offered up not been a perfect life. (Bruce, 127)*

## In Christ, We Receive

### Our Justification

*the free gift following many trespasses brought justification...one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. (vv 17,18)*

*[Christ] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Rom 4:25)*

### Our Righteousness

Don't forget the solidarity principle. We are “in Christ” and thus have his obedience, just as we were “in Adam” and inherited his disobedience. By God's (and Christ's) “free gift of righteousness” [Christ's righteousness!], we are “constituted righteous.” It's not an external gift that we carry around in our hands like a Christmas present that we could drop, break, or lose. We are in communion/union with Christ as his bride and **are made perfect** with the perfection of Christ. The obedience of Christ is reckoned to our account with all the consequences that righteousness brings about. (see Murray, 206)

*Just as the relation to Adam means the imputation to us of his disobedience, so the relation to Christ means the imputation to us of his obedience. (Murray, 206)*

### Our Reign

In Christ's reign over sin, we reign. In 5:17, we are expecting Paul to say “much more will Christ reign in life.” But Paul inserts Christians into the reigning of Christ:

*much more will **those who receive** the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness **reign in life** through the one man Jesus Christ.*

How can it be that we will reign? It is that solidarity again. If Christ is reigning and we are “in him,” then we are reigning.

### Overflowing Grace—How Much More!

*For if many died through one man's trespass, **much more** have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ **abounded** for many. (Rom 5:15)*

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*judgment and condemnation take into account only one sin of one man and the whole race is condemned. But the free gift and justification take into account the many, **the multitudinous sins of a great multitude**. How aggravated must sin be and how unspeakable grace must be. (Murray, 199)*

### **Eternal Life in Christ**

Christ becomes a “life-giving Spirit”

*The first Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit...The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (1 Cor 15:22, 45–49)*

May we bask in the glory of our salvation, our righteousness in Christ, our eternal life with our Savior—and be willing to speak truth to our neighbors, friends and family members as the Lord provides occasion.

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### **References:**

F. F. Bruce. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963.

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<sup>1</sup> This passage is difficult because of the “all men” phrase. We think it would be great if all men could be saved, yet it is clear in Scripture that not all will be saved. One can, however, turn this around to understand that not all will be condemned, either. We must take the phrase “all men” to mean “the many.” Many will be saved and many will not.