

March 5, 2017

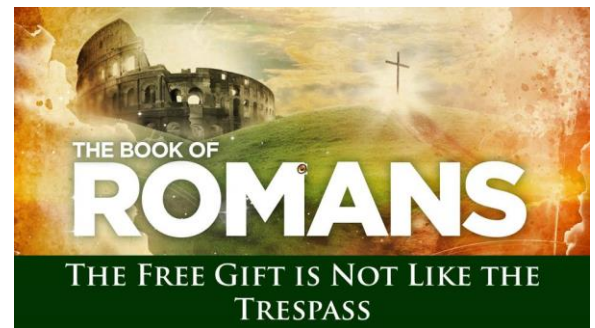
First Sunday in Lent

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

Psalms 32

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11



## THE FREE GIFT IS NOT LIKE THE TRESPASS

During Lent we reflect on the desperate condition men find themselves in without Jesus Christ. Our objective should always be to focus not only on these circumstances, but also on the remedy. God offers pardon and new life to every person who believes. The passage in Romans is not easy to understand, but it brings us to the main issues – how man has gone wrong, and what God has done to set him right.

*Romans 5:12-14. Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned -- <sup>13</sup>sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. <sup>14</sup>Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.<sup>1</sup>*

- *Therefore ...* (v.12). Romans 5 is in the middle of a long argument that begins in Romans 1:16 and ends with Romans 8:39 – a section sometimes called “The gospel according to Paul.” “Therefore” in v.12 informs us that this passage is based on what has been said, namely that the human race without exception is infected with sin, that sin leads to death and separation from God, and that man cannot in his own strength change any part of this state of affairs. Verses 12-14 are essentially a recap of the problem. The solution follows.
- *... as sin came into the world through one man ...* (v.12). The Bible says the human family tree goes back to two people – Adam and Eve. It says sin came into the world for the first time when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Sin and its consequences – evil, suffering, and death – did not exist in the world before this, but always remained afterwards. Some say you and I “inherited” the sinful nature of our ancestors, as if we were born with a type of DNA that makes us sinful. It seems like that in a way.

When David prayed, “*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*” (Ps 51:5), he was not talking about a sin his mother committed. He was expressing this same thought: we are all born with a sinful nature. Paul’s argument, as we have seen and will see, is that we can do good things and make ourselves and others think we are good, but we cannot, by ourselves, change this basic nature.

Most of us are convinced of this anyway. But to the people of that time, especially the Jews, there was more to this. They held that the sins of one person would bring guilt to everyone related to that person. If one member of the congregation sinned, the entire congregation needed to be cleansed. In the world today, the closest analogy we have to this is the family. If a man gets into trouble with the law, his family feels the guilt. The wife discovers “friends” who no longer seem to know her. The kids have trouble at school, and feel guilty and don’t know why, and are tempted themselves to break the law. Perhaps you know of other examples. Yet, the Bible says each individual is responsible for his or her own actions. (See Ezek 18:1-30.)

Nevertheless, when Paul said sin came into the world through one man, he meant that we are all part of Adam’s family. In this sense, Adam’s nature and the guilt of his original sin “extend” to all human beings.

- *... and so death spread to all men because all men sinned ...* (v.12). Just as physical death is the result of a fatal disease, so death, both physical and spiritual, is the consequence of sin. Is this “disease” avoidable? Here in this one phrase we have both sides of the coin: “*death spread to all men*” (the disease is unavoidable), and “*because all men sinned*” (the disease is avoidable because all men choose to sin).
- *Sin indeed was in the world before the law was given* (v.13). Paul changed to a new thought here. (The text

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<sup>1</sup> Bible quotations are from the RSV.

returns to the problem of sin and death, and its solution, in v.15.) Sin was in the world, Paul said, *before the law*. It didn't "count" as it did after the law was given; nevertheless, *death reigned from Adam to Moses*. Adam and Eve didn't need the law to tell them they had sinned. Neither did Cain, nor do you and I. Men have always known, regardless of the law. Therefore, *death reigned from Adam to Moses* (v.14).

The law was meant to give God's chosen people a guide – a Manufacturer's Handbook – on how to live a righteous life. If a man obeyed the letter and spirit of the law, he would have no sin. But men could not, and having the law, they knew they could not. Thus, when the law was given, sin was "counted" (v.13).

Romans 5:15-17. *But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. <sup>16</sup>And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. <sup>17</sup>If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, 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.*

• *The free gift is not like the trespass* (v.15). We come now to the cure – the solution to the problems of sin and death. Earlier verses explained how one is forgiven and justified before God through the cross by faith alone, rather than by obedience to the law. (Review Romans 1:16-17, 3:21-28, 5:1-2, and 5:8-10.)

The grace of God is free – neither earned nor paid for. Why is it not like the trespass? There are many reasons. Perhaps you have one of your own. Here are a few to discuss:

1. *The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Rom 6:23).
2. Sin brings judgment and condemnation, suffering and eternal death. But the free gift – the grace of God – brings forgiveness, mercy, pardon, redemption, and justification – *peace* with God. Romans 5:1 says, *"Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*
3. *The abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness* (v.17). You and I had no choice concerning the nature we were born with – the self-serving instinct handed to us by our ancestors. But the free gift, which offers a new birth and a new life, is different – it is received by choice – by those willing to receive it. Thus the trespass (sin) is inevitable, but the gift (God's grace) is not inevitable. It is received by choice.  
God is not going to force this priceless gift of his grace and new life on you. It is not like the trespass – not inevitable. You must be willing to repent and ask for it, and surrender your prideful life to Jesus. If you have not yet done this, there is no time like the present. And if you are thinking of holding out in order to fix some situation or make yourself more presentable to God, forget it. God will fix everything.
4. When you receive God's gift of grace, you *reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ* (v.17). Peter described it as a new birth, *"You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable"* (1 Pet 1:23). Paul concluded, *"We are more than conquerors through him who loved us"* (Rom 8:37) – "more than" because sin now is conquered not by you, but by the One who has conquered sin permanently, forever.

Romans 5:18-21. *Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. <sup>19</sup>For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. <sup>20</sup>Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup>so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

• *Condemnation for all men ... acquittal and life for all men* (v.18). All are condemned, because *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Rom 3:23). The law was given to show men how to keep from sin, but since no one is able to obey it, the law succeeds only in *increasing the trespass*.

But *grace abounded all the more* (v.19). If you believe you are too evil, or too old to change – if for any reason you believe you cannot be saved, the Bible says you are wrong. The grace of God *reigns* – overcomes all obstacles. *Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more*. Jesus shed his own blood to save you. He will receive you today, wherever you are, in whatever condition. Just come to him now. He has already paid for your sins on the cross. Ask Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior, now and forever.