



Group Discussion Guide

Romans 5:12-21

For groups meeting March 8 evening through March 15 morning.

In this section of Romans, Paul contrasted Adam and Jesus Christ and how each affected humanity. This is a natural next step after his writing about how Christ's death and resurrection reconciled and saved those who believe in him. Paul reminded his readers how sin came into the world "through one man" and that death was a result of sin (v. 12). He also pointed out that death spread to every human because every human committed sin. While sin was tied to the law, sin also preceded the law, though it was not counted as sin because people had not yet received all the specific commands of God (v. 13). The second part of verse 13 is somewhat difficult to understand, and this is where the importance of context comes into play. It seems Paul was not attempting to excuse those who lived before the giving of the law, but rather he was teaching about the pervasiveness of sin throughout history and throughout humanity, regardless of the time period. Between Adam and Moses, he wrote, people still sinned and "death reigned," even though their sin "was not like the transgression of Adam," (v. 14). All we have to do is read Genesis 6:5-6 to understand the level of human wickedness after Adam and before the flood, which of course falls between Adam and Moses. Those who sinned during this time did not have a direct command of God to violate as Adam did, but they still sinned and still died as a result. Their sin may not have "counted" in the sense of violating the law of God, but it still separated them from God and still caused them to perish from the earth.

While verses 12-14 focus on the reality of sin and death, at the end of verse 14 Paul wrote that Adam was a symbol of "the one who was to come" ... an allusion to Jesus Christ. And then in next verse, Paul contrasted "the free gift" of salvation and "the trespass" of sin as he wrote that salvation by grace is stronger than sin and death (v. 15). He stated that Adam's sin brought condemnation on the human race as sin spread to all who would come after him, but the free gift of salvation overcame the many sins that would come as a result of Adam's one act of rebellion (v. 16). The reign of death, Paul wrote, would pale in comparison to the reign of life experienced through the grace of Jesus Christ (v. 17).

Paul repeated this comparison/contrast in the next two verses as he wrote that one sin led all humans to be condemned, but also that one "act of righteousness" (Christ's sacrifice for us) offers forgiveness, righteousness and eternal life to all (vs. 18-19). In verse 20 we see a connection to verse 13 that helps us to understand Paul's point about the law. Here he wrote that "the law came in to increase the trespass," which shows once again that sin already was present before the giving of the law (it could not be "increased" if it was not present). How did the law "increase" sin? The more commands that were specifically given, the more commands that would naturally be broken. The tally of sins against God would grow in number. Paul's point in stating this was to again show the power of the Gospel ... that regardless of how many

sins were committed by people, “grace abounded all the more” (v. 20). As people have experienced physical death throughout history, the reign of sin is clearly seen. However, this reign is not final, as God’s grace rules “through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 21).

Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, how would you describe the entrance of sin into the world, and how that caused the entire human race to fall into sin?
2. Paul wrote that sin was in the world before the law was given, and as a result “death reigned from Adam to Moses” (v. 14). What do you think it would have been like to live in a time before God gave the law and before Christ had come? Do you think you would have any hope for forgiveness and eternal life? Why or why not?
3. Paul stated, “the free gift is not like the trespass” (v. 15). According to the rest of verse 15 and verse 16, how are they different from one another?
4. Even though we know that God’s grace reigns through Jesus Christ, death is still very much all around us. How can we see beyond the death we experience in our world to stay focused on the truth that believers “reign in life” (v. 17, 21)?
5. How would you say the law “increased the trespass” as Paul wrote in verse 20?
6. Over and over again, Paul referred to salvation through faith in Christ as “the free gift.” Why do you think he did this? Why do you think it is important for us to repeatedly focus on the truth that salvation is a free gift?
7. What does the power of Christ mean to you in your life right now?