

**Romans (24):
The Believer's Reign in this life through Grace**

Introduction:

The apostle Paul has been holding forth the basis of hope for Christians. This hope was based upon their past justification before God through faith alone, which assured their future glorification by God. Christians are the objects of God's love as was demonstrably shown at just the right time, for when they were helpless and guilty--without strength, Christ had died for them, even when they were ungodly. Christians are now a rejoicing people, for God has reconciled them to Himself. They have confidence in Christ that they will be saved from God's wrath on the Day of Judgment and they rejoice their relationship with their God.

We now arrive to Romans 5:12-21. No one said that it would be easy working through this epistle in a thorough manner, and it does not get easier here with the passage before us. This "is one of the most difficult and controversial passages to interpret in all of Pauline literature." In the first 11 verses of Romans 5 Paul argued that the hope of Christians is secure due to Jesus Christ dying on His cross on their behalf. And now here, in verses 12-21 Paul addresses God's dealings with two powers or reigning entities that threaten the security and well-being of Christians. These are sin and death. Paul shows that Jesus Christ has conquered both of these enemies. And so, here Paul provides a more full explanation of how God secured salvation to us through Jesus Christ so that we have a sound basis for our hope. The key principle for us to understand this matter is to recognize the *solidarity* in which God deals with the human race. The entire human race was represented by Adam whose sin brought condemnation and death to that entire race. But God has reversed the consequences of Adam's sin, whereby Christ brings all of *His* race, a new humanity, into the state of God's grace, which secures for them deliverance from God's wrath and entrance into eternal life.

Let us begin by reading **Romans 5:12-21**.

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned-- ¹³for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵But 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 by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷For 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.

¹⁸Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 5:12-21)

I. The meaning of the passage

A. The sin of Adam--the cause of death in mankind (Rom. 5:12-14)

The first paragraph of our passage contains three verses, verses 12-14, which are two sentences in our English Standard Translation (ESV) (vs. 12f; v. 14). Now we who are reformed believe in the inspiration and the infallibility of the Holy Scriptures. Every word of the Bible is the word of God. But we also understand that

God used human writers with their own style and vocabulary to write in order to address specific occasions and situations. In this paragraph, Romans 5:12f, the human dimension of Paul's writing is rather pronounced. For technically, or grammatically, the first sentence is an incomplete sentence. **Verse 12** reads, ***“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned--”*** The incompleteness of the sentence is not seen in the initial word, “therefore,” for this connects the sentence that went before. The “therefore” of verse 12 shows Paul's intention to draw a conclusion from what he had set forth before, namely, that God justifies sinners by His grace through faith alone, “therefore”, or, we may conclude that, “just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” Rather, the incompleteness of the sentence is due to the next words of the sentence. Paul wrote, “Therefore, ***just as*** sin came into the world through one man...” In a complete sentence, one would expect to read a second portion of the sentence that would begin with words like, “then in the same way.” But Paul does not do this. At the end of his first statement of verse 12 he felt the need to give an explanation of what he had just asserted to his readers. And so, Paul stopped his sentence at midpoint at the end of verse 12 and he set forth his aside or parenthesis in verses 13 and 14, which may be recognized in the text by the hyphen at the end of verse 12.¹

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned--”

Let us now consider the substance of what Paul declared in verse 12. He wrote that ***“sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned--”*** God's word teaches us that sin entered the world through the first man that God had created, that being Adam. The Bible presents Adam as an historical person, created by God as the progenitor of the human race.

Paul describes Adam as a public person, that is, God constituted him as the representative head of the human race; this is commonly referred to by theologians as Adam being ***the federal head*** of the human race. When Adam sinned, it resulted in having consequences for the entire human race, for he was their representative before God. When Adam first sinned against God, God thereafter regarded and treated the human race due to Adam's sin. When Adam incurred God's judgment upon sin, that being the sentence of death, God sentenced the entire human race to death for Adam's sin. Adam's one sin brought the death sentence upon him. That same one sin of Adam's brought God's death sentence upon the human race. The reason that people are born into this world spiritually dead (cf. Eph. 2:1f) and the reason that mankind suffers physical death is because of the judgment of God upon Adam for his sin.

Now we may look at the aside or the parenthesis of **verses 13 and 14.**²

¹³***for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.***
¹⁴***Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.***

¹ The commentator **John Murray** described this: “Verse 12 clearly begins a comparison but does not complete it. At the middle of the verse we have the words “and so” which must not be rendered “even so”. The latter closes a comparison but the former, as here, carries on what had been affirmed and is coordinative or continuative. Most interpreters recognize this and do not argue the question. Verse 12 is an unfinished comparison; it has a protasis but not apodosis. Therefore it is an unfinished sentence. Why so? It is not difficult to find the reason. In verse 12, particularly at the end, the apostle had stated something which he needed a parenthesis and this parenthesis we have in verses 13, 14. In other words, the facts stated in verse 12 dictated the necessity of adding without delay the data given in verses 13 and 14. Hence the particular thought of verse 12 is broken off at the end of verse, and it so happens that the apostle did not come back again to complete his comparison in the terms of verse 12. This should not perplex us. Paul did not follow stereotyped stylistic patterns and, as we shall see, the parenthesis which broke off the comparison is a very eloquent one. The comparison is incomplete but the thought is not broken off. The development of thought dictated the construction which we find here.” John Murray, ***The Epistle to the Romans***, vol. 1 (William B. Eerdmans, 1959), pp. 180f.

² The King James Version (KJV) and the New King James Version (NKJV) not only has a hyphen at the end of verse 12, but the translators also identify the aside by a beginning parenthesis. Another unique feature of these translations is that they make Paul's aside to contain verses 12-17, rather than just verses 13 and 14.

Why did Paul feel the need to explain himself in this way? It may be that he was addressing what he assumed would be an objection on the part of his Jewish Christian readers.

Paul's assertion of the universality of sin and death in this part of verse 12 is open to the objection, on the basis of Jewish beliefs, that there can be no sin, and hence no death, apart from the law. To meet this objection, Paul makes clear that even without the law to define sin sharply (v. 13b), both sin (v. 13a) and death (v. 14) were present and powerful.³

Paul asserted that even before God had given His law through Moses sin was in the world. Now we do not know when God had created Adam and Eve. For hundreds of years the date of creation was accepted by Bible believers that Bishop James Usher (1581-1656) had "calculated" from the Genesis record. This was 4004 BC. But his calculations were flawed because he made wrong assumptions about the nature of the genealogies of Genesis. He had not realized that there were gaps in the recorded genealogies in which many generations may have been passed over. So, calculating the date of creation or of the precise times of the early chapters of Genesis is not possible. But we do know that the Lord gave His law through Moses in the 15th century BC.⁴ So, if death is due to God's judgment for having broken God's law as the Jews believed, how is it that people died before God gave His law? Paul reasons that obviously people died during this period of history. And people died even though they had not sinned in the same manner that Adam had sinned. How is this explained? Paul affirms that these people had died for they had suffered the penalty of Adam's one sin.

Upon Paul mentioning Adam by name in verse 14, he declares him "who was a type of the one who was to come." In other words, Adam as the federal head of the human race was a type, or an Old Testament foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, who is the federal head of His people, who are the total of the redeemed from among the human race.

We may now continue with **verse 15**. Paul wrote, ***"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 by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many."*** Here Paul begins to show how Adam and Jesus Christ differ in how their lives impacted the people over whom they were head. They were each the federal head for their people. But the free gift that Jesus secured for His people is not like the trespass of Adam that resulted in the death of his people. Here Paul describes Adam's sin as a *transgression*, which is the intentional breaking of a clearly revealed law. The law that Adam had transgressed was God's command to Adam and Eve, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:16). The result of Adam's headship was different from the result of the headship of Jesus Christ. Adam's one transgression resulted in ***the death*** of his people, the entire human race; the gift that is bestowed through the grace of Christ resulted in ***the free gift*** to all of His people, those who have faith in Him. Here the "free gift" of grace is likely the righteousness that is granted believers through faith alone.

"The grace of God" is the disposition of gratuitous favour; "the free gift" is the bestowment which issues to us and is to be identified with "the free gift of righteousness" (vs. 17); "the free gift by grace" indicates that what is bestowed upon us is altogether of grace.⁵

We next read in **verse 16**, ***"And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification."*** Here the contrast is one of consequence. The consequence of Adam's one sin was condemnation upon his one trespass. Paul makes reference to "the judgment." This refers to God's curse pronounced upon

³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (William B. Eerdmans, 1996), p. 330.

⁴ Conservative Bible interpreters believe that the Exodus from Egypt took place around 1450 BC. The majority of "scholars", however, who are not necessarily evangelical, have believed that Israel's exodus from Egypt took place in the 13th century BC, but in recent decades they have largely abandoned this theory.

⁵ Murray, *Romans*, vol. 1, pp. 194f.

Adam and Eve upon their transgression. The “free gift” being the gift of righteousness, results in the believer’s justification before God. The free gift that comes through Jesus Christ cancels “many trespasses” in that it brings justification to all of Christ’s people.

Verse 17 takes the matter further. *“For 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.”* Death is personified as a ruler reigning over mankind. All mankind was subject to death; it was the king ruling and determining the destiny of mankind. Adam’s sin had enthroned death. But those who receive the abundance of God’s grace in salvation, and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through Jesus Christ. And so, due to Adam’s sin, death ruled mankind, but due to Christ, Christians reign in life through grace. Here we have a hint of what is ahead for us in Paul’s epistle. He is setting the stage to show how Christians, who have been justified through the gift of righteousness, may reign over sin in this life through the grace of God that is in Jesus Christ. In other words, here Paul is showing how the believer’s justification leads to and results in the believer’s sanctification, defeating sin in life and living according to God’s righteousness, even the righteousness of God’s law.

We next read **verse 18**: *“Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.”* Some have taken this verse in order to argue for universalism, that the entire human race will be saved from sin one day, that there will be no one finally eternally damned. They argue that just as Adam’s one sin led to condemnation *“for all men”*, so the work of Jesus Christ leads to justification and life *“for all men.”* But this interpretation twists and contorts everything else that Paul has set forth in this chapter. The “all men” damned by Adam are not the same group of people as the “all men” who are justified. “All men” in Adam die; “all men” in Christ reign in life through grace.

To what specifically does the “one act of righteousness” refer? It speaks of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the sum of His life of obedience, both His active obedience to the law of God and His passive obedience that led Him to submit to His death upon the cross.⁶

...the reference must be to the righteousness of Christ as that on the basis of which judgment passes upon all men to justification of life. If the question be asked how the righteousness of Christ could be defined as “one righteous act”, the answer is that the righteousness of Christ is regarded in its compact unity in parallelism with the one trespass, and there is good reason for speaking of it as the one righteous act because, as the one trespass is the trespass of the one, so the one righteousness is the righteousness of the one and the unity of the person and of his accomplishment must be always assumed.⁷

Verse 19 records a very similar idea. *“For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”* Here Adam’s disobedience is set against Christ’s obedience. Again, we should view Adam’s sin as one sin that he committed, but Christ’s obedience is the totality of His life of righteousness, His perfect obedience unto His death upon the cross. Here Paul depicts Adam’s sin as “disobedience.” He had already referred to it as a “transgression” (v. 14), a trespass (vs. 15, 17, 18), and now as “disobedience.” When Paul declared that Adam’s disobedience “made sinners” of many, he was saying that by Adam’s sin all his descendants were constituted or regarded as sinners. Paul is stressing the solidarity between Adam and his people, the entire human race. Here, as in verse 12 when Paul declared that “all sinned”, Paul is declaring that all of us, the entire human race, became sinners when Adam sinned. At the same time Paul is affirming that through Christ’s “obedience” many would be constituted, or reckoned as righteous. Here, as before, when we read of Christ’s obedience, we should understand it as a reference to His entire incarnation, but culminating upon His cross.

⁶ Another possibility is the one act of Jesus could be a reference to His crucifixion, but I prefer to see it as His entire incarnation life and death as “the one righteous act.”

⁷ Ibid, pp. 201f. Douglas Moo also sees the “one act of righteousness” to be a reference to the obedience of Jesus Christ. See Moo, *Romans* (Eerdmans, 1996), p. 341.

The concept of obedience as applied to the work of Christ on behalf of believers is more embracing than any other (cf. Isa. 42:1; 52:13-53:12; John 6:38, 39; 10:17, 18; 17:4, 5; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:7, 8; Heb. 2:10; 5:8, 9). It is significant that it should be used here. It indicates the broad perspective from which we must view the accomplishment of Christ which constitutes the basis of God's justifying act. Undoubtedly it was in the cross of Christ and the shedding of his blood that this obedience came to its climactic expression, but obedience comprehends the totality of the Father's will as fulfilled by Christ. And this brings into the clearest focus what was implied in "the grace of the one man Jesus Christ" (vs. 15), "through the one, Jesus Christ" (vs. 17), and "through the one righteous act" (vs. 18).⁸

Paul next gives an explanation for God giving His law through Moses to His people Israel. It would have been incomplete and inappropriate for Paul to speak of the history of redemption without addressing the role of God's law given to Israel through Moses. The event at Mount Sinai was one of the most important events of history to the Jewish people. The law of God influenced how the Jews saw themselves and how they related to their God. Therefore Paul addressed the role of God's law in the history of redemption in the last two verses of this passage. We read in **verses 20 and 21**.

²⁰*Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,*
²¹*so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 5:12-21)*

God gave His law through Moses in order to "increase the trespass." This means that God desired to show the hideous nature of sin by making His law known, which resulted in people sinning more egregiously against God. This was a position that was contrary to Jewish thinking. The Jews believed that God had given His law in order to restrain sin, and indeed, in one sense it was. But here Paul argues that God did the opposite. He gave His law to His people in order that their transgressions might increase in number and in their guiltiness. Paul shows, however, that this should not cause Christians to become disheartened, for Jesus Christ has also through grace conquered the law's ability to condemn believers. The strength of sin was in the law, and sin had reigned in and over humanity because of the condemnation that God's law had brought upon mankind, both through Adam in the garden and through Moses at Sinai. But now through Jesus Christ grace reigns in the believer, delivering him from the damning reign of the law that had damned everyone due to sin.

Great sin requires greater grace. Great sinners need a Great Savior. But we ourselves as a race could not know fully the depth of sin to which we were fallen simply by considering Adam's sin alone. The need is for God to dispel our false sense of security, our self-righteousness, so that we would desire and seek the grace of God alone in Jesus Christ alone. For this reason God gave His law, so that we would know what He knew, just how wicked we are apart from His grace. But now that Christ came and He accomplished His work through His death on the cross, the grace of God reigns in the believer, producing righteous living in him, even as he is led unto his final destiny, which is the enjoyment of eternal life.

II. Several lessons from our passage

A. The three Purposes of the Law

Here is the substance of the theological note on this subject from *The New Reformation Study Bible*:

Scripture shows that God intends His law to function in three ways, which Calvin crystallized in classic form for the church's benefit as the law's threefold use.

Its first function is to be a mirror reflecting to us both the perfect righteousness of God and our own sinfulness and shortcomings. As Augustine wrote, "the law bids us, as we try to fulfill its requirements, and become wearied in our weakness under it, to know how to ask the help of grace." The law is meant to give

⁸ Murray, pp. 204f.

knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:13; 7:7-11), and by showing us our need of pardon and our danger of damnation to lead us in repentance and faith in Christ (Gal. 3:19-24).

A second function, the “civil use,” is to restrain evil. Though the law cannot change the heart, it can to some extent inhibit lawlessness by its threats of judgment, especially when backed by a civil code that administers punishment to proven offenses (Deut. 13:6-11; 19:16-21; Rom. 13:3, 4). Thus it secures civil order, and serves to protect the righteous from the unjust.

Its third function is to guide the regenerate (i.e. true Christians) into the good works that God has planned for them (Eph. 2:10). The law tells God’s children what will please their heavenly Father. It could be called their family code. Christ was speaking of this third use of the law when He said that those who become His disciples must be taught to do all that He had commanded (Matt. 28:20), and that obedience to His commands will prove the reality of one’s love for Him (John 14:15). The Christian is free from the law as a system of salvation (Rom. 6:14; 7:4, 6; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 2:15-19; 3:25), but is “under law toward Christ” as a rule of life (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2).⁹

In Romans 5:20 Paul was describing the first use of the law outlined above. God through His law held up a mirror before us in which we could see our sinful and guilty condition as well as our own helplessness to bring about our own remedy.

How does the law of God cause sin to increase? The law stirs up sinful longings in the heart. We read of Paul’s own testimony in **Romans 7:5** and **8**.

For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. ⁶But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. ⁷What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.” ⁸But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.

B. We are under the law of God as mediated to us by Christ, not by Moses.

Although it is true that the believer is under grace rather than the law, we should recognize that as Christians we remain under God’s law, but as directed so through Christ, rather than Moses. Although we are not under the law as a covenant, we are under the law to Christ. What this means is that the law of God abides, but it is administered to us differently from the way it was administered by Moses to the nation of Israel. Allow me to explain further.

First, when Moses gave forth God’s law, he applied God’s law to the unique setting and circumstances of national Israel. Israel was a nation that was chosen to be distinctly blessed of God. It was a theocracy; God was Himself to be her King. As a physical nation with physical borders, God through Moses applied His law to that people in that setting. There were ceremonial laws for their national observance. There were civil laws for their political and societal life. There were moral laws that governed their personal behavior as the people of God. And so, the summary of God’s law was given in the 10 commandments and then these laws were through Moses applied to the various aspects of Israel’s social, political, and religious life.

Second, the Lord Jesus applied God’s law to His disciples as citizens of the kingdom of God. When the Lord Jesus came upon the scene, He came as the Promised King of Israel. He ushered in the long promised kingdom of God. This kingdom would, in accord with Old Testament prophecy, be a spiritual kingdom that would encompass not Israel alone, but people from all the nations of the earth. This kingdom was not a physical, but rather a spiritual kingdom. It has no physical territory. It has no central place of worship. It has no direct civil authority, that is, the kingdom of God, being spiritual, may even exist alongside Caesar’s kingdom.

Now the Jesus Christ is the King (Lord) of this kingdom. He rules over this kingdom of people, who have become citizens through the new birth, having repented of their sins and who believe on Him as their Lord

⁹ *The Reformation Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 259.

and Savior. The Lord Jesus rules over His people according to God's law administered to us through grace. He commands and leads them into a life of righteousness. We read of the Promised Savior through the prophecy of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist:

“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people,⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David,⁷⁰ as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began,⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us,⁷² to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant,⁷³ the oath which He swore to our father Abraham:⁷⁴ To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear,⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.” (Luke 1:68-75)

Thankfully, not only does He rule over us according to righteousness, as King and Priest, the Lord Jesus also dispenses grace to His people from His throne enabling them to live in accord with His commandments. Through the gift and power of the Holy Spirit that the Lord Jesus gives to His people, we are able to live “in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.” And so, as citizens of the kingdom of God, we live according to the law of God, but as applied and taught to us through the Lord Jesus, rather than Moses. Moses himself spoke of the time when this transition would occur.

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. (Acts 3:22f)

Third, the Lord Jesus taught that the law of God was the rule of life for people.

In **Matthew 5:13-27** we see the Lord Jesus teaching the gathered crowd the way to live before God. They were to live a life of good works. “You are the salt of the earth.” “You are the light of the world.” “Let your light so shine among men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:13, 14, 16). In the immediate context the Lord tells these people what determines right conduct. He first tells them that *He came to fulfill God's abiding rule for life, His law.*

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. (Matt. 5:17-18)

This speaks of His own fulfilling of the law in His life even unto death and, I believe, it speaks of His work of salvation in rendering His people righteous according to the standards of God's law and enabling them by the power of the Holy Spirit to live lives patterned by the law of God. He then speaks of *the abiding rule of God's law for people:*

Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that unless your righteousness [This is by definition, (1) a life in accord to God's law and (2) a gift of Christ's righteousness credited to the believer through faith alone.] exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will be by no means enter the kingdom of heaven

C. Justification is the ground upon which the life of sanctification is built.

With the conclusion of Romans 5, Paul concludes his discussion of his major theme that has occupied him since the early portion of his epistle. He comes to an end of his discussion on the justification of the ungodly before God. He now turns his attention to the sanctification of the believer through the reign of grace. But we saw how even here in Romans 5 Paul began to make the transition from justification to sanctification.

Romans 5:17 reads, “For 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.**”

It is extremely important for us to know how justification and sanctification relate to one another. Much significant error in professing Christendom, even serious heresy, is due to the failure to understand the distinctions as well as the common traits that justification and sanctification have with one another.

Now, it is very important to understand how these two aspects of our salvation, our justification before God and our sanctification by God, are similar but also quite different from one another. Let us take a few minutes to describe these similarities and their differences.¹⁰

1. In what ways are our justification and sanctification alike?

(1) They are like one another in that they are both the result of the working of God. They have the same author. It is God who justifies, and it is God who sanctifies. With regard to the first, we read in **Romans 8:33** that God is its author: “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? ***It is God that justifies***” (Rom. 8:33). We read in several places that God is also the author of the work of sanctification that He carries on within the soul. God said to Moses, “***I am the Lord that does sanctify you***” (Exo. 31:13; Lev. 20:8).

(2) They are like one another in that they originate of the free and sovereign work of God’s grace. Justification is an act of free grace, and so is sanctification. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3:5). They are both of grace--freely and sovereignly bestowed by God.

(3) They are alike in that they always are seen together in every person who is the object of God’s grace. There has never been a person who was justified, but that he was also sanctified. There never has been the case that a man experienced God’s inward work of sanctification, but that he was also justified before God. Paul described the Christians at Corinth, “Such were some of you (i.e. flagrant sinners), but you are washed, but you are ***sanctified***, but you are ***justified*** in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11).

(4) They are like one another in that both of them are the fruit of the Word of God. God justifies sinners through their belief in the truth. Jesus said to His own, “Now you are clean through the Word that I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3). God also sanctifies His people by the Word of Truth. He prayed to His Father, “Sanctify them by Your truth; Your Word is truth” (John 17: And also Ephesians 5:6 of Christ’s work in His church, “That He might sanctify and cleanse His Church, with the washing of water by the Word.”

(5) They are like one another in that both are necessary to eternal life. God has declared that no man will escape God’s condemnation on Judgment Day unless He is justified. He has also declared that no one will pass the scrutiny of God’s judgment unless he is sanctified. They are of equal necessity to the possession of eternal life.

2. In what ways are our justification and sanctification differ from one another?

We have seen that in some ways they are much alike, but in other ways they are quite distinct from one another.

(1) **Justification is an act of God about the *standing* of a man before God; but sanctification is the work of God concerning the *nature* of a man.** It has been said in this way: Justification is an act of God

¹⁰ This section has been delivered in the past. It is contained in FBC453, which was delivered on December 9, 2007.

as a Judge about a delinquent, absolving him from a sentence of death; but sanctification is an act of God about us, as a physician, in curing us of a mortal disease.

Imagine this scenario. You have a criminal that comes before a judge to be tried. He is charged with high treason. He is found to be guilty. He is worthy of death. But this same guilty man is also a diseased man. He has a disease of which he will not recover, but he will most certainly die. Not only does he need to escape from the condemnation of his guilt, but he needs healing of his deadly disease. Justification is God's answer to his guilt; sanctification is God's answer to his sinful condition from which he must be delivered. God acts toward the sinner in absolving him of his guilt; God works in that same man to cure him of his sinfulness. Both are necessary. Justification, therefore, is an act of God as a gracious Judge, but sanctification is a work of God as a merciful Physician. It has been pointed out that David joins them both together in Psalm 103:3, "(God) Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases."

(2) Justification and sanctification differ from one another in that justification is an act of God's grace **on account of the righteousness of another**, even Jesus, but sanctification is a work of God in which **he infuses righteousness into us**. The first, justification, speaks of imputation: God imputes or reckons the righteousness of Jesus Christ to be that of the believing sinner. This is God's work **for** us. The second, sanctification, speaks of infusion, in which God works **in** us to make us holy.

(3) Justification and sanctification differ from one another in that **our justification is complete, or perfect, but our sanctification is incomplete**. Justification occurred when the sinner first truly believed on Jesus Christ as his Savior. Justification is complete, knowing of no degrees. It is the same in every believer, new and old alike. The newest believer among us is as justified before God as the one among us who has believed longest. There is not degree of our justification. You are either justified or you are not. Our justification cannot be diminished or increased. It cannot be interrupted or it cannot cease to be. But sanctification is an imperfect, incomplete, changeable thing in every believer. One believer is more sanctified than another. It knows of many degrees between persons and even in the same person. A true believer may not become more justified than he is presently, but he can become much more sanctified than he is currently. A saint who has died and gone to be with the Lord is no more justified there than he was when he was a believer here on earth. But then he will be completely sanctified, far above the condition in which he now finds himself.

(4) Justification and sanctification differ from one another in that **our justification involves no work of our own**, but is based solely upon the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, **but our sanctification involves very much our work**. As God has commanded through Paul,

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling.

And yet, we know and confess that this work we do is in no way meritorious and in no way contributes to our justification. Justification involves our believing, trusting, resting in Jesus Christ **alone** for our righteousness. Our sanctification also involves our believing, trusting, resting in Jesus Christ, but it is as we go forth with all of our effort. We rest in Jesus Christ for our justification, but we work with all our light toward our full sanctification. The Scriptures liken it to striving, fighting, running, sowing, seeking, journeying, enduring, overcoming, and even exerting violence in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. There is no salvation for the believer unless you trust Jesus Christ alone for your justification. But there is no salvation for you if you refuse or fail to "**work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling.

Now, herein lays the great difference between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. I believe this is one of the major errors of Roman Catholicism that renders the "gospel" they preach as "another gospel" (cf. Gal. 1). It teaches that a sinner becomes justified before God after and because God has **infused** righteousness in him/her. The Bible (and historic Protestantism) states that the sinner becomes justified before God through faith alone, apart from works, because God **reckons** Christ's righteousness to the believer. According to Rome, the "Christian" is not justified until he himself is made righteous; the Bible teaches that the believing sinner is regarded as righteous because of Christ. Rome teaches that justification is the result of a long process which

God works in a believer through this life, on thereafter through purgatory, until he is finally and fully holy, then he becomes justified in God's sight. This is terrible error that renders that one who believes this to still be condemned in his sins. Paul wrote, "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain" (Gal. 2:21).

But were Rome's great error is to see sanctification as the basis of justification, ***the great error of evangelicalism is that as long as you have you justification*** (and that comes through a one-time decision), ***you can have salvation irrespective of sanctification***. Oh, yes, sanctification is taught as a good thing, a desirable thing, and there are many consequences for failing to live so as to be sanctified, but it is generally taught that it has nothing to do with salvation. As a result, few if any live the Christian life with view to this great end, even the salvation of our souls.