

Romans

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Romans 5:18-21



In this closing verse of Ch. 5, Paul essentially speaks of three dominions: Death, Grace, and Life. He sets up his closing thoughts in vs. 17: "For if by the transgression of the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in the life through the One, Jesus Christ".

DEATH Vss. 18-19

- Paul stays with his theme of the solidarity of all humanity. And we should see that this is not just some ancient philosophical way of looking at the world. Currently it is popular among scientists to speak of the LUCA, the last universal common ancestor (LUCA), a hypothesized common ancestral cell from which all of life originated. Scientists also speak of the first two humans as Mitochondrial Eve and Y-chromosomal Adam. The idea in both cases is the commonality of DNA throughout humanity and indeed all creation. Humans have about 70% of the same DNA as acorn worms, which is sort of an earthworm-looking creature that primarily lives at the bottom of the sea. So Paul's point would go a step further to say that not only does all humanity share the same biology, but we also share the same spiritually. "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all...". Through one person's sin, death and sin entered the world and consumed us all.
- The terrible reality and consequence of this is readily seen. The next big part of the Creation story is how Cain killed Abel. Sin and Death become the central theme of the rest of the Old Testament. Pharaoh orders the first-born male children of all the Jews be put to death. Moses survives but murders an Egyptian guard. The people of Israel sinned against God by not crossing the Jordan as He commanded, so that generation all died in the desert. Death reigned.

GRACE Vss. 18-20

- "...even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification...". Grace. Isn't interesting how that just at the very time the atomic bomb was being developed, so too was penicillin. One bringing death, the other bringing life.
- "...even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous." Grace

- “...but where sin increased grace abounded all the more.” Grace triumphs over sin. Grace reigns. John Newton – “I am a great sinner, but Christ is a great Savior”.
- Just as Sin and Death are painfully real and obvious, so too is Grace joyously real and obvious. Stuart Briscoe, in his commentary on Romans, said, “For every sin that robs and destroys another particle of human experience, there is grace to build and restore. For every grave opened by sin and death, there is a door opened in heaven by grace. While mourners mourn over loved ones laid to rest, angels rejoice over sinners coming to repentance”.
- Looking at the crucifixion we see Sin and Death in its fullness. But even as the crowd was shouting for Christ to be crucified, and nails were driven into His body, “grace abounded all the more”. “Father forgive them”, were the words from the cross to the crowd. “Today you will be with Me in Paradise”, said Jesus to the thief. Grace abounded all the more.
- No one understood this better than Paul. In 1 Timothy 1:13-14 he wrote to his young student, “...even though I was previously a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief and the **grace** of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus”.

Life Vs. 21

- Briscoe also points out that this Reign of Life is both Quantitative and Qualitative. Quantitative in that it too reaches throughout humanity, all round the world wherever Death once ruled. Qualitatively it speaks to the life that is only experienced through the New Birth in Christ, what Peter refers to as “partakers of the divine nature” and how we now live “with all the things that pertain to Life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3-4).
- Paul tells us in Romans 5:17 that those who live in the New Birth of Christ, “will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ”. Frederic Louis Godet in his commentary on Romans argues that, “Death reigns; it is a tyrant. But life does not reign, it has not subjects; it makes kings”. Because we live in Christ and He in us, we are not subjects, but we will reign with Christ (2 Timothy 2: 12). Because we have experienced the New Birth in Christ, we are born to the palace, not the peasantry.