



Sermon Transcript November 8, 2020

The Gospel
What Must I Do?
Romans 5:12-21



This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on November 8, 2020 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
Romans 5:12-21

¹² 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— 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.

¹⁵ 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. 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. ¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ 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. 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.

Introduction

Whenever I sit down with someone to share the gospel with them, I use a presentation called *Two Ways To Live*.¹ I like how it doesn't assume anything. It starts with God who created all things. I like how it incorporates simple drawings to communicate key points of the gospel. And once you have it sketched out on a piece of paper, it is helpful to refer to as you answer questions people have about the gospel. Back in August, I received a text from someone who used to be part of our church family, but moved to another state. He was doing his devotional that morning and was asked to write down who he is thankful for. I was humbled when he told me I was one who came immediately to mind. And here is why. He said, "My walk with the Lord started with you thirteen years ago in your office with my wife and *Two Ways to Live*."

What I have attempted to do with this sermon series on the gospel is to utilize the drawings of *Two Ways to Live* with the outline of the gospel presented to us in Romans 1-5. We saw at the beginning of our series that the theme of Romans is "the gospel." It is widely argued that Romans 1:16-17 lays out for us the theme of the book of Romans. It is here where Paul asserts, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel . . .*" From here on out, Paul seeks to demonstrate that "salvation is not a humanly controlled phenomenon but comes entirely from God."² Here is a simple way to put it. From the beginning to the end, the gospel is a "God-thing."

In his thesis statement in Romans 1:16-17, Paul says two things about the gospel. First of all he says that *it is the power of God for salvation*. The power God used to create world (Romans 1:20) is the same power God uses to change your life. That is a lot of power. The power God used to raise Jesus from the dead (Ephesians 1:19-20) is the same power that God exerts to change your life. That is a lot of power. We are going to see that in our passage this morning. In this world where sin and death reign, God's grace is greater and stronger. Paul alludes to this in Romans 5:17. Here he uses the words *much more* to compare the power of God's grace against the power of sin and death. In this world where *sin and death reigned . . . 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 gospel has the power to save and change your life. No person is beyond the reach of the power of God. God has the power to save your life.

The second thing Paul does with his opening statement about the gospel is that he gives us a summary of what the gospel is—a brief definition of the gospel. What is Paul talking about when he talks about the gospel? What is the gospel? He says, "*For in it*

the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.” In other words, the gospel lays out for us how to be made right with God. That is what we have been looking at by marrying the drawings of *Two Ways to Live* with the content of Romans 1-5. So lets put it together. What have we seen to this point? (See chart on p. 11)

God is the ruler of this world: By virtue of the fact that God created all things, he is the rightful ruler of the world. Created in God’s image, we were to rule over God’s creation, to care for it and enjoy it. The key to life is to live life under God’s good rule. We are dependent on God. We saw in Romans 1 that through creation we should clearly see that there is a God and that he is powerful and good. So our fitting response is to worship him and to give him thanks. We are not independent. We are dependent on God who wants to bless us. *But is that the way it is now?*

We all reject God as the ruler of our lives and try to run our lives without God: This was a main point Paul was driving home in Romans 1-3. After demonstrating that both the Gentile and the Jew are both guilty of rebelling against God, Paul makes these universal statements. *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* And he adds, *“None is righteous, not even one.”* Instead of living God’s way, we seek to live life our own way and we make a mess of ourselves, our society and the world that God has made. It leaves us asking, *What will God do about our rebellion?*

God’s punishment for our rebellion is death and judgment: When we see a wrong committed, we long for justice—especially if we are the victim of the wrong that has been committed. This quest for justice is part of what it looks like to be created in the image of God. And so in Romans 2:5 Paul talks about a coming day of judgment. He even calls it in this verse *the day of wrath*. Someday, we will give an account for our lives and we will answer to God. We are told in Romans 6:23 that *the wages of sin is death*. Because of our sin we are *destined to die, and after that to face judgment*. And so *God’s justice seems hard*. *How can I possibly be made right with God?*

God’s righteousness is revealed to us in Christ and the cross: In Romans 3 and 4 we are reminded that God loves us and he sent his son, Jesus into the world. Jesus revealed to us what the righteousness of God looks like in that unlike us, he was fully obedient to the Father. Thus he did not deserve death and judgment like we do. And yet, out of profound love for us, he died on the cross and took upon himself the judgment of God for our sin. He died in our place. Therefore, when we turn in faith to Jesus, God takes the righteousness of Jesus and places it on us and we are forgiven. As we discovered last week, *that is not all*

God raised Jesus to life again as the ruler of the world: Through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, Jesus has conquered death and he gives us new life. Knowing that our sins are forgiven, he gives us a new start as children of God. And furthermore, when he returns to judge the world, we know that we will be received by Jesus, not because we earned it, but because through faith in Jesus he freely gives to us his grace—his salvation.

Two Ways to Live

This brings us to our final point in the presentation of the gospel. We have one remaining box to fill in. This final box calls for a response to the gospel. How will you respond to who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for you on the cross and through his resurrection from the dead? Jesus calls for a response when he asks his disciples, “*Who do you say that I am?*” To this question, Peter said, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” That is a response. But not everyone responds that way. In response to the question, “*How many will be saved?*” - Jesus says in Luke 13:24 “*Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you will seek to enter and will not be able.*” Jesus is the “narrow door.” It is the question that the people on the day of Pentecost asked when Peter proclaimed the news that Jesus had risen from the dead. Many of those who heard him *were cut to the heart* and they turned to Peter and asked “*what shall we do?*” It is the same question that the Philippian jailor asked of Paul in Acts 16, “*What must I do to be saved?*” The gospel demands a response.

One response might be an emphatic “No!” Not everyone believes that Jesus is the Son of God. Not everyone embraces the idea that Jesus atoned for their sin on the cross and that he actually rose from the dead. And so their response to the gospel is simply, “No!” Their response is “unbelief.” That is a response to the gospel.

Some may find that they are drawn to the gospel and may even say that they agree with it, but they are hesitant to turn to Jesus because they know it will cost them. The invitation to follow Jesus is an invitation to “pick up your cross and follow him.” It is not always easy and I appreciate when a person weighs this decision. Nabeel Qureshi tells his story of converting from Islam to Christianity in his book *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*. It was a several year process of having all of his questions answered and slowly coming to believe that Christianity was true. But the thing that was keeping him from turning in faith to Jesus was what it would cost him to express his faith in Jesus. He said, “My decision would shame my family with incredible dishonor. Even if I were right about Jesus, could I do such a terrible thing to my family? After everything they had done for me?”³ It is an amazing story, but as he continued to seek after God, God

revealed himself to Nabeel and he turned in faith to Jesus. So some may respond with their mind but not with their heart. Of course, God calls us to respond with our heart.

Some people may even say that they are “on the fence” when it comes to responding to the gospel. That is where my friend who texted me was when we met in my office. He reminded me of this in his text. He said “he wanted to be on the right side of the fence—God’s way, not man’s way.” And so when someone says that they are “on the fence” it usually means that they are in process and on journey. But even when you are “on the fence” you are still in a state of “unbelief.” It is not a fence you can really straddle. Jesus calls us to belief.

And of course, another response is to say “Yes!” And the truth of the matter is that until you say “Yes!” to Christ, no matter where you are in the journey you remain in a state of unbelief. Jesus says that there are really only *Two Ways to Live*. He says it several ways at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7. Either you are walking through the narrow gate that leads to life or the wide gate that leads to destruction. There is not a third gate. Either you are a tree that bears good fruit or a tree that bears bad fruit. Either you are building your house on the rock or you are building your house on the sand. When it comes to the gospel, there are only *Two Ways to Live*. Either you believe or you don’t.

That is the point of our passage this morning in Romans 5. Paul begins in verse 12 by saying, “*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 word “*therefore*” at the beginning of this verse indicates that Paul is getting ready to draw a conclusion. Some think that Paul is drawing a conclusion from the eleven verses that are at the beginning of Romans 5. In Romans 5:1-11 he spoke about the certainty of our hope in Christ and so now he is going to tell us the basis for such certainty—it is because in Christ we have someone who is greater than Adam. Or you could put it this way—God’s grace runs deeper than our sin. But I think this passage doesn’t just draw a conclusion to Romans 5:1-11. I think it brings a concluding thought to everything Paul has written to this point in Romans. It is a summary to what Paul has told us about the gospel up to this point. And basically he is saying, you are in one of two camps. Here he is saying that you are either under Adam or you are under Christ. There is no other option.

And so after going off on a bit of a tangent, Paul comes back to his main point in verse 18 and he says, “*Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one*

*act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.” Are you under Adam or are out under Christ? That is the comparison that Paul sets up for us in this summary statement of everything he has said up to this point. Three times he goes back and forth between the two. It is like sitting center court and watching the ball go back and forth in a tennis match. *Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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. . . so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Adam brings death. Christ brings life. Who are you under?*

Two Ways to Live: Life Under Adam

What do we mean when we say that we are “under Adam”? Paul says in verses 18-19, *Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men . . . For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.* The *one man* is Adam. Having spent Romans 1-3 talking about the universal nature of our sin, Paul explains how it is that we are all sinners. It is because of the sin of one man. 

My personal sin isn’t just what is wrong with me. It is my sinful nature that is wrong with me. It is a nature I inherit from Adam. This is what we call “original sin.” But the title for this important doctrine may be a little misleading. Sure, it is “original” in that it comes from the first man, Adam. And of course, it is “original” in that we are born with it and it is with us from the moment of conception. David said, in Psalm 51:5, *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me.”* But the doctrine of “original sin” means more than that it came from the first man—Adam—and that I have been plagued with this sinful nature from birth. It means that Adam’s sin and guilt is my sin and my guilt. In other words, we are “in union with Adam.” Therefore, because of Adam’s sin, the entire human race is guilty before God.

I know that many people find this hard to accept. The idea of sin and guilt being imputed upon us from Adam goes against the human ideal of fairness. And furthermore, it debunks the notion that humans are intrinsically good. Some are offended by this and consider it even unjust. We are by nature sinners. And I think Paul would ask us this morning, “How else do you explain the universal nature of our sin?” How else can you explain that *none is righteous* if we are not sinful by nature? Douglas Moo asks the question this way: “But what better explanation is there for the extent and the persistence of crimes against humanity?”⁴

Now if you still take issue with the idea of original sin, you still have to deal with the actual sins you commit. We say in our confession of faith that “human beings are sinners by nature and by choice.” In my human nature, I still choose to sin. Wayne Grudem says that “everyone who protests that original sin is unfair has also voluntarily committed many actual sins for which God also holds us guilty.”⁵ Romans 2:6 says that God “*will render to every man according to his works.*” Colossians 3:25 says “*the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done.*” There is plenty we have done that renders us accountable before God.

This is the point Paul is getting at in Romans 5:20. Here he says, “*Now the law came to increase the trespass.*” At the very least, when we think of the law we think of the Ten Commandments. They tell us how to love God and how to love others. The deeper you dive into the Ten Commandments, the more you realize how far you fall short of what God requires. You might say in a moment of pride, “I never committed adultery.” Or, “I never murdered anyone.” Jesus asks, “Have you lusted after a woman?” “Have you been angry with another, defaming the image of God in them by calling them an idiot?” “Have you worshiped other things in the place of God?” “Have you slandered anyone or gossiped against another?” The list goes on and on. Guilty as charged.

So Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:8 that sure, “*the law is good.*” But it was never given to us to “fix our problem.” He says in Galatians 3:21 that the law was not given so that it can bring life. It can’t bring life. Instead, it was given to demonstrate the depths of our sinful heart. If anything, our inability to keep the law of God illustrates that by nature we are sinners.

Consequently, Paul tells us three times in this passage that because of Adam’s sin *death reigned*. In verse 14, we already say that “*death reigned from Adam to Moses.*” In verse 17, again we are reminded that because of one man’s sin “*death reigned through that one man.*” And in verse 21, as given evidence by the giving of the law of God to us, “*sin increased . . . as sin reigned in death.*” And that is exactly what Adam was told in Genesis 2:16, “*for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*”

By death, we mean several things. We are alienated from God. Our sin alienates us from one another. Our sin impacted all of creation and so we experience things like floods and hurricanes and wildfires. And in the end, we die. We return to the dust from where we came. I often say at funerals that death is not a biological issue. Rather, death is a theological issue. And that is not all. In our confession we say, “human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under his wrath.” And so

some day, we stand before God and must give an account for our lives. And who here can stand on their own? No one.

One way for me to live is to remain “under Adam.” It is continuing to live in rebellion against God and trying to run life on my own without God. If I remain under Adam then death continues to reign in my life. I am condemned by God and will face judgment.

Two Ways to Live: Life Under Jesus



But there is another way to live. We are invited to live our lives under Jesus. Notice how Jesus and Adam are put side by side in verses 18-19. *“Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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.”* The idea is that if sin and death is passed to us through one man, then righteousness and life can be passed down to us through one man. That one man is called the “second Adam.” That one man who passed life to us is Jesus. His *“act of righteousness”* is the death he died on the cross for our sin.

James Boice said that the doctrine of original sin is not repulsive. Rather it is an act of God’s grace.⁶ If sin is passed to us through one person, then God has opened a way for righteousness to be freely given to us by God’s grace. Five times from verses 15-17 Paul says that the grace God gives us is a *“free gift.”* I think the free gift of God’s grace is sometimes just as hard to accept as the doctrine of original sin. The two go hand in hand. The need for God’s grace means that I have nothing that I can present to God to merit anything before him. This is why we need to know the depth of our sin and what is wrong with us. It is far more than a character flaw or an imperfection here or there that plagues us. I am sinful by nature and I am sinful by choice. I need God to step in and rescue me from my sin. Our confession ends by saying, “Only through God’s saving work can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.”

There was a sitcom on television a few years ago called *Parks and Recreation*. Micah Mattix wrote an article reflecting on the doctrine of original sin through the lens of this sitcom. He pointed out how the flaws of the characters were readily on display in each episode. After rehearsing their flaws he concluded that “All of them reflect the goodness of humanity perverted by original sin.”⁷ That is what we said earlier. You might not like the doctrine of original sin but how else do you explain the universal reality of broken

and sinful humanity? But here is what really caught my attention in the article about the sitcom. He noted that at the end of most episodes, after their faults—their shortcomings—their sins are acknowledged some commitment is made to try to reform their ways to make themselves better. Mattix observes that “willpower and hard work is not a very satisfying answer” to fix their “sin” that troubles them.⁸ And yet, their attempt to do something to fix it acknowledges something must be done to fix it.

And that is the point. Only Jesus can fix it! Trevin Wax says that one of the beautiful things about original sin is that it tells me what the real answer is to my problem. “I need God to swoop in and change me and save me himself. I can’t save myself. I am so wicked. I know my heart. I know my thoughts.”⁹ My sin is like chains that have me wrapped up in bondage. One pastor said that original sin allows us to honestly pray, “Lord, I am the failure that you always knew I would be.”¹⁰ But God loves us anyway. And so Paul says in verse 20, “*but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.*”

So the other way to live is to turn in faith to Jesus. How do you do that? “What must I do?”

- Repent of your sin by confessing that you are a sinner by nature and by choice.
- Rely on Jesus, the righteous Son of God, who took your place by taking your judgment on the cross and who rose again to assure you that your sins are forgiven.
- Submit to Jesus as the ruler of your life.

That is what it means to live under Jesus. Which way do you want to live? Under Adam? Or, Under Jesus?

Conclusion

You can express these things with a simple prayer: *Dear God, I know that I am not worthy to be accepted by you. I don't deserve your gift of eternal life. I am guilty of rebelling against you and ignoring you. I need forgiveness. Thank you for sending your son to die for me that I may be forgiven. Thank you that he rose from the dead to give me new life. Please forgive me and change me, that I may live with Jesus as the ruler of my life. Amen.* Like the man who met me in my office, this can be the beginning of a life lived under Jesus.

Tim Keller sums up the truth of this passage well when he says, “You are more sinful than you ever dared to believe. But you are more accepted in Christ than you ever dared to hope.”¹¹ Hallelujah!

¹*Two Ways to Live* <https://twowaystolive.com/>

²Grant Osborne, *Romans* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004) 39

³Nabeel Qureshi *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014) 252

⁴Douglas Moo *Romans: The Application Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 192

⁵Wayne Grudem *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 495

⁶James Boice *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986)

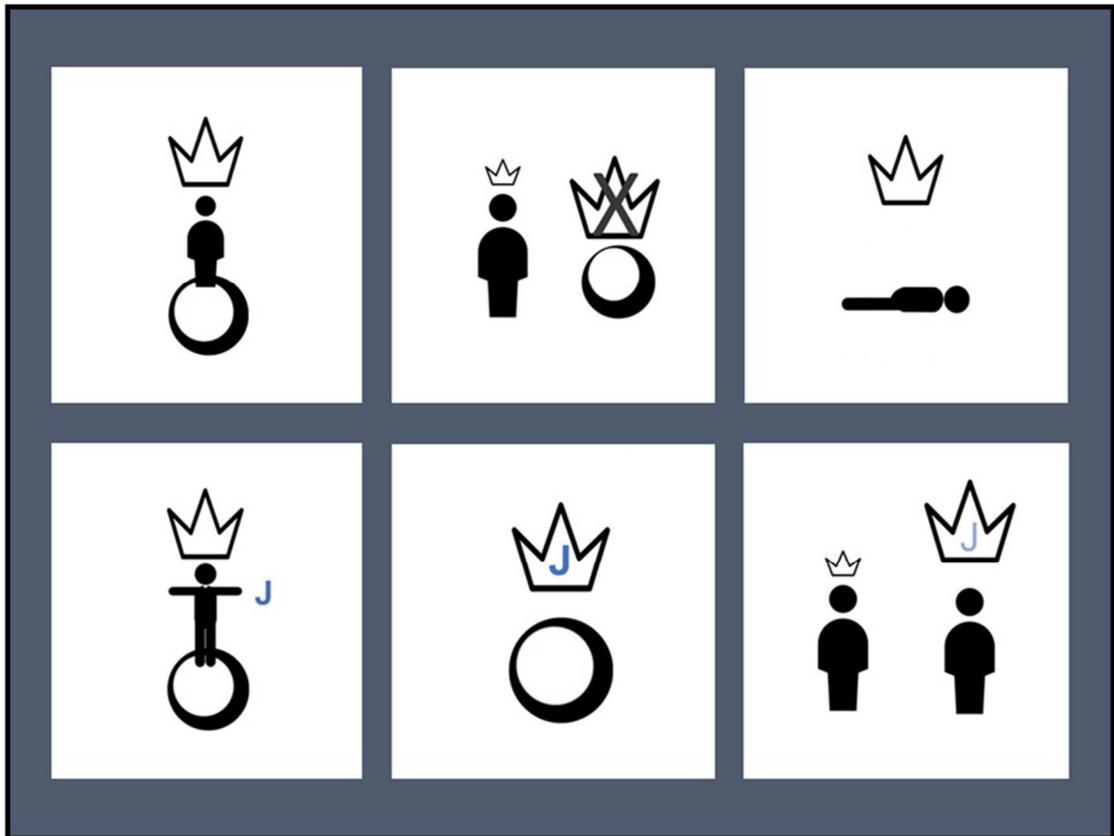
⁷Micah Mattix “Original Sin and Parks and Recreation” www.thegospelcoalition.org March 7, 2012

⁸Ibid

⁹Trevin Wax “Why Should I Believe in Original Sin” www.thegospelcoalition.org Sept. 29, 2009

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹Timothy Keller *Romans 1-7 For You* (The Good Book, 2014) 135



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COMMUNITY GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Share something you are celebrating and share something that concerns you.
2. Share a report on the people you have been praying for to come to faith in Christ. Spend time praying for the people on your list.

Diving Into The Word

3. Take a look at the chart on page 11. As a group, practice talking through each of the drawings.
4. Read Romans 5:12-21

How would you summarize the message of this passage in a single sentence?

As you look at your own life and history, in what ways can you see that Adam was a good and fair representative for you?

How precious is Christ's active obedience to you? Why?

How have these verse caused you to love the Lord Jesus even more?

5. Reflect and ponder this statement: "You are more sinful than you ever dared to believe. But you are more accepted in Christ than you ever dared to hope."

Taking It Home

6. What is one thing you are taking from your study?
7. Spend some time in worship and praise of God for what he has done for you.