



### **Romans 5:12-21 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> 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— <sup>13</sup> for 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 sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> Now the 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 leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Romans 5:12-21 (HCSB)**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all men, because all sinned. <sup>13</sup> In fact, sin was in the world before the law, but sin is not charged to a person's account when there is no law. <sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression. He is a prototype of the Coming One.

<sup>15</sup> But the gift is not like the trespass. For if by the one man's trespass the many died, how much more have the grace of God and the gift overflowed to the many by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ. <sup>16</sup> And the gift is not like the one man's sin, because from one sin came the judgment, resulting in condemnation, but from many trespasses came the gift, resulting in justification. <sup>17</sup> Since by the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup> So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is life-giving justification for everyone. <sup>19</sup> For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. <sup>20</sup> The law came along to multiply the trespass. But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more <sup>21</sup> so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

# English Standard Version Bible - *Study Bible*<sup>1</sup>

## Romans 5:12-21

**5:12-21 Hope in Christ's Triumph over Adam's Sin.** The main theme of this section continues to be the future hope of those who have trusted in Christ. Adam brought sin and death into the world, but those who have believed in Christ are full of hope, for Christ has reversed the consequences of Adam's sin and has given his own life and righteousness to secure their eternal glory. The extended parallel between the one man Adam's sin and the one man Christ's obedience shows that Paul considered Adam a historical person, not a fictional or mythological character; it also shows the importance of insisting on the historicity of Adam today (cf. [1 Cor. 15:22, 45-49](#)). These verses also show that Adam had a leadership role with respect to the human race that Eve did not have, for even though Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit before Adam did so ([Gen. 3:6](#)), it was "one man's trespass," that is, Adam's sin, through which "sin came into the world" ([Rom. 5:12](#)) and through which "many died" ([v. 15](#)), "death reigned" ([v. 17](#)), and "many were made sinners" ([v. 19](#)).

**5:12 Sin came into the world through one man**, namely, Adam ([v. 14](#); cf. [Gen. 3:17-19](#); [1 Cor. 15:21-22](#); also note on [Gen. 5:3-5](#)). **And death through sin** is contrary to secular thought that regards death as a "natural" part of human life. In the biblical sense, death is never natural but is "the last enemy" ([1 Cor. 15:26](#); cf. [15:54](#)) that will be conquered finally and forever at the return of Christ ([Rev. 21:4](#)). **Death** in these verses most likely denotes both physical death and spiritual death together (Paul often connects the two). Most evangelical interpreters think that **and so** means "and in this way," and the phrase **all sinned** means that all sinned in Adam's sin because he represented all who would descend from him (just as Christ's obedience would count for all his followers, whom he represented, [Rom. 5:15-19](#)). Another interpretation is that all sinned personally because they were born into the world spiritually dead. The word translated **men** is the Greek word *anthrōpos*, which in the plural can mean either "people" of both sexes or "men," depending on the context. It is translated "men" here (and in [v. 18](#)) to show the connection with "man" (*anthrōpos*, singular), referring to Christ.

**5:13 Sin was in the world** before the Mosaic law was instituted, but it was not technically reckoned as sin before the time of the law. Paul does not mean that people were guiltless without the law, for he has already said in [2:12](#) that those without the written law are still judged by God (e.g., those who perished in the flood [[Genesis 6-9](#)] and those who were judged at the tower of Babel [[Gen. 11:1-9](#)]). Since people still died, this shows that they were guilty—as a consequence of Adam's sin but possibly also as a consequence of having transgressed the universal moral law in their consciences before the written Mosaic law was given.

**5:14** Those who did not live under the law were still judged for their sin, since death held sway over them. Still, their **sinning was not like the transgression of Adam**, since Adam violated a commandment specifically revealed to him by God. Adam is a **type** (model, pattern; Gk. *typos*) of Christ, for both Adam and Christ are covenantal heads of the human race, so that all people are either "in Adam" or "in Christ" (cf. [1 Cor. 15:22](#)). All are in Adam by physical birth, while only those with the new birth are in Christ.

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1. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 5".

**5:15** Paul contrasts the consequences of the work of Adam and of Christ five times in the next five verses, showing their decisive roles as covenantal heads of the people they represent. Paul clearly teaches “original sin,” the fact that all people inherit a sinful nature because of Adam’s sin. Paul probably is also teaching that all people are in fact guilty before God because of Adam’s sin. **Many** (i.e., all human beings excluding Christ) **died** through Adam’s one sin. Death begins with spiritual separation from God and culminates in physical death. By contrast Paul emphasizes the lavishness of Christ’s grace bestowed on the many that belong to him.

**5:16** Again the astonishing depth of God’s grace in Christ is featured. The **one trespass** of Adam resulted in the **condemnation** of all, but Christ overcame the flood of sin that overwhelmed the world, so that all who belong to him enjoy **justification**.

**5:17** Death ruled the human race by virtue of the one sin of Adam, whereas Christians now stand as rulers because of the work of Christ.

**5:18** The **one trespass** of Adam, as the covenantal head of the human race, brought condemnation and guilt to all people. In a similar way, Christ’s **one act of righteousness** (either his death as such or his whole life of perfect obedience, including his death) grants righteousness and life to all who belong to him. **for all men**. Some interpreters have advocated universalism (the view that all will be saved) based on these verses. But Paul makes it plain in this context that only those who “receive” (**v. 17**) God’s gift belong to Christ (see also **1:16-5:11**, which indicates that only those who have faith will be justified). The wording “**as... so**” shows that Paul’s focus is not on the number in each group but on the *method* of either sin or righteousness being passed from the representative leader to the whole group: the first “all men” refers to all who are in Adam (every human being), while the second “all men” refers to all believers, to all who are “in Christ.” On the translation “men,” see note on **5:12**.

**5:19** Because of Adam’s disobedience, all people **were made** (Gk. *kathistēmi*, “cause[d] to be”) **sinners**. Thus, when Adam as mankind’s representative sinned, God *regarded* the whole human race as guilty sinners, thereby imputing Adam’s guilt to everyone. In other words, God regarded Adam’s guilt as belonging to the whole human race, while also *declaring* that Adam’s guilt does in fact belong to all. All are therefore sinners, and are born with a sinful nature that is set in the mold of Adam’s transgression.

**5:20** The typical Jewish view in Paul’s day was that God gave the law to counteract the sinful human impulse. In Judaism there was the proverb, “The more Torah the more life” (Mishnah, **Aboth 2.7**). But Paul points out that the law came in **to increase the trespass**, probably in the sense that once people had written laws from God, they committed not just “sins” against God’s law in their conscience, but, even more seriously, willful “trespasses” (Gk. *paraptōma*), like Adam’s first “trespass” against a clear spoken command directly from God (cf. note on **Rom. 4:15**). Hence, the surpassing excellence of Christ’s salvation is shown in that **grace abounded** even **more** than these increasing sins.

Romans 5:12-21

**5:12-21** In this section, Paul brings his major discussion of justification by faith to a close with a complex, compressed, and controversial analogy. He shows that grace in justification reaches and affects us in Christ much more than sin and death have affected us in Adam.

**5:12** **Therefore** gives this verse a loose connection with the previous section. **Sin** and **death** are almost personified here (cp. [v. 21](#), "sin reigned in death"). **Just as** (Gk *hosper*) introduces a long and difficult Greek sentence. The main comparisons are clear, but some of the details lead interpreters to different opinions. Paul was thinking of how both the first Adam ([Gen 1-3](#)) and the last Adam (Jesus Christ) have a universal significance for humanity. Interpreters are divided over the phrase **because all sinned**. The two major interpretations are (1) all people commit sin and therefore die, and (2) somehow all humans sinned "in Adam." The second view is more likely and entails either that Adam was the federal head of the race and acted on behalf of us all, or that Adam was the seminal head of the race and we were somehow "in him."

**5:13-14** These verses support the second interpretive option for [verse 12](#) (see note there). Sin "reigned" ([v. 21](#)) over humanity before the giving of the law even though none had sinned in the way Adam sinned. Adam's sin was a personal, deliberate act that plunged the human race into physical and spiritual death. All humans, including newborn infants and young children who are incapable of judging right and wrong and thus are not deliberate sinners, are under death's domain. All people now are born spiritually dead ([Eph 2:1-3](#)). Adam's sin had this broad effect because he was a type (Gk *tupos*) or prefiguration of Jesus, the **Coming One**, and represented all of humanity just as Jesus would do on the cross.

**5:15-16** The works of Adam and Jesus have similar scope but drastically different effect. One **sin** plunged humanity into ruin, but God gave the gift that issued in justification in spite of our many **trespasses**. What was gained through Jesus is far greater than that which was lost through Adam.

**5:17** **Death** took the entire human race into its kingdom. The author of Hebrews portrayed this vividly when he wrote about what Jesus accomplished through His death on the cross: "Through His death He might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the Devil—and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death" ([Heb 2:14-15](#)). Believers, who with the rest of humanity were once slaves in the kingdom of darkness ([Col 1:13](#)), were brought into Christ's kingdom as sons to **reign** with Him.

**5:18** Adam's sin resulted in **condemnation for everyone**, whereas Christ's substitutionary death made possible **life-giving justification for everyone**.

**5:19** The expression **will be made** does not refer to the last judgment, as if our salvation were pending until that time. Rather, it pictures the fact that believers are **made righteous** when they come to faith. Since Paul knew many people were yet to come to faith when he wrote, it was fitting to use future tense.

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2. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., HCSB Study Bible, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 5".

[5:20-21](#) As in [Gal 3:19](#), Paul describes the **law** as a subordinate player in the drama of redemption. The law was never an end unto itself. Rather, its function was to **multiply the trespass** by bringing the knowledge of **sin**. By this the need for **grace** is highlighted, allowing God to bestow it **even more**. The law also had other functions that Paul does not discuss here.

## NLT Life Application Study Bible<sup>3</sup>

### *Romans 5:12-21*

[5:12](#) How can we be declared guilty for something Adam did thousands of years ago? Many feel it isn't fair for God to judge us because of Adam's sin. Yet each of us confirms our heritage with Adam by our own sins every day. We have the same sinful nature and are prone to rebel against God, and we are judged for the sins we commit. Because we are sinners, it isn't fairness we need—it is mercy.

[5:13, 14](#) Paul has shown that keeping the law does not bring salvation. Here he adds that breaking the law is not what brings death. Death is the result of Adam's sin and of the sins we all commit, even if they don't resemble Adam's. Paul reminds his readers that for thousands of years the law had not yet been explicitly given, and yet people died. The law was added, he explains in [5:20](#), to help people see their sinfulness, to show them the seriousness of their offenses, and to drive them to God for mercy and pardon. This was true in Moses' day, and it is still true today. Sin is a deep discrepancy between who we are and who we were created to be. The law points out our sin and places the responsibility for it squarely on our shoulders. But the law offers no remedy. When we are convicted of sin, we must turn to Jesus Christ for healing.

[5:14](#) Adam was the counterpart of Christ. Just as Adam was a representative of created humanity, so is Christ the representative of a new spiritual humanity.

[5:15-19](#) We were all born into Adam's physical family—the family line that leads to certain death. All of us have reaped the results of Adam's sin. We have inherited his guilt, a sinful nature (the tendency to sin), and God's punishment. Because of Jesus, however, we can trade judgment for forgiveness. Christ offers us the opportunity to be born into his spiritual family—the family line that begins with forgiveness and leads to eternal life. If we do nothing, we receive death through Adam; but if we come to God by faith, we receive life through Christ. To which family line do you now belong?

[5:20](#) As a sinner, separated from God, you see his law from below, as a ladder to be climbed to get to God. Perhaps you have repeatedly tried to climb it, only to fall to the ground every time you have advanced one or two rungs. Or perhaps the sheer height of the ladder seems so overwhelming that you have never even started up. In either case, what relief you should feel to see Jesus offering with open arms to lift you above the ladder of the law, to take you directly to God! Once Jesus lifts you into God's presence, you are free to obey—out of love, not necessity, and through God's power, not your own. You know that if you stumble, you will not fall back to the ground. Instead, you will be caught and held in Christ's loving arms.

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3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1903-1904.

# Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary<sup>4</sup>

## Romans 5:12-21

### Adam and Christ Contrasted / [5:12-21](#)

Having linked Jews and Gentiles through Abraham to the promises of God, Paul now shows how the gospel applies to all humankind. Paul made important points by going back to Abraham; but by going back to Adam, he will draw conclusions that affect the fate of every person.

**5:12** Sin came into the world through one man. **Adam sinned** against God causing a domino effect: **sin entered the entire human race**, then **sin brought death**. Because **everyone sinned**, then everyone also died ([Genesis 2–3](#)). Death is the consequence of being under the power of sin. It was not in God’s original plan for human beings to die, but it was the result when sin entered the world. Inevitably, the gift of life we bequeath to our children includes with it the sting of death. All human beings have two characteristics in common: They are sinners, and they will die.

**5:13-14** God’s **law** was not **given** until the time of Moses, so the people who lived between Adam and Moses did not have any specific laws to obey or **break**. But sin that was in the world was the power or force that causes people to act independently of God. All people are under the power of sin, and all people act in rebellion against God. Sin was in the world from the beginning, but it came into sharp focus when the law was given.

Adam disobeyed **an explicit commandment of God** ([5:12](#)). His descendants who lived prior to the time of Moses could not break any specific laws because there were none. But they still sinned, witnessed by the fact that **they all died**. Adam’s descendants had sinned with Adam ([5:12](#)). Death is the result of Adam’s sin and ours, even if our sins don’t resemble Adam’s. For thousands of years, the law had not been explicitly given, and yet people died. The law was added ([5:20](#)) to help people see their sinfulness, to show them the seriousness of their offenses, and to drive them to God for mercy and pardon. This was true in Moses’ day and in Paul’s day, and it is still true today. Sin is a deep rupture between who we are and who we were created to be. The law points out our sin and places the responsibility for it squarely on our shoulders, but it offers no remedy.

The **contrast between Adam and Christ** is that Adam’s one act determined the character of the world; Christ’s one act determined the character of eternity. In modern terminology, we could say that Adam was a flawed prototype, but Christ was the perfect original. Just as Adam was a representative of created humanity, so is Christ the representative of the new, spiritual humanity.

**5:15** God’s **generous gift of forgiveness** through Christ (justification) has a greater but opposite effect than the trespass of Adam and its consequences. Yet in each case, the act of one affected the lives of **many**. Because of Adam’s sin, **death** entered the human race, and since then all people have died (with the Bible’s exceptions of Enoch and Elijah). All people will die until the end of this age. Because of **Jesus Christ**, however, we can trade judgment for **forgiveness**. We can trade our sin for Jesus’ goodness. Jesus offers us the opportunity to be born into his spiritual family—the family line that begins with forgiveness and leads to eternal life. If we do nothing, we have death through Adam; but if we come to God by faith, we have life through Christ.

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4. Barton B. Bruce et al., *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 598-599.

[5:16](#) God passed judgment on Adam's one sin of disobedience. As a result, Adam and the entire human race received **condemnation**. Everyone since Adam has sinned, and yet Christ overcame those many trespasses and brought righteousness to those who accept him, **even though they are guilty of many sins**. The result of sin is death; the gift of God—his justifying sinners—results in reigning forever with Christ.

[5:17](#) By capitulating to sin, **Adam caused death to rule over** the whole human race. Death is inescapable; it comes to every living thing. We all live close to the valley of the shadow of death. And the reign of death over creation began because of Adam's sin. However, there is a remedy. Those who **receive God's wonderful, gracious gift of righteousness will live in triumph over sin and death**. What a promise this is to those who love Christ! We can reign over sin's power, over death's threats, and over Satan's attacks. Eternal life is ours now and forever. Though this promise has its greatest fulfillment in the future, it also has a significant immediate impact. In Christ, death loses its sting (see [1 Corinthians 15:50-57](#)). We are still subject to the physical suffering and death brought by sin in the world, but we are free from the eternal spiritual separation that we would experience outside of Christ. Also, in the power and protection of Jesus Christ, we can overcome temptation (see [8:17](#) for more on our privileged position in Christ).

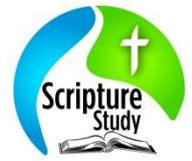
[5:18-19](#) The same statement is made in different words in these two verses. Paul emphasizes the contrasting roles of two single agents, Adam and Christ. **Adam's one sin brought condemnation** on the human race; this **one person disobeyed God** causing all people to become **sinners**. But **Christ's one act of righteousness**, done because he **obeyed God**, opened the way for **all people** to be **made right in God's sight** and given eternal life.

[5:20](#) This statement is certainly not what Paul's Jewish readers expected to hear. The **law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were**. Paul is winding up the argument he has been carrying on through the first five chapters of his letter. The purpose of the law for his own people, the Jews, had been to make them aware of their need for salvation. Sin was present from Adam, but the giving of the law was like having a huge spotlight turned on—the sinfulness of people became all the more defined. The solution to sin was not law, but grace. No matter how much people sin, **God's wonderful kindness** is greater. When our awareness of sin increases, we need to ask God to help us see that his grace is always greater in its capacity to forgive than our capacity to sin.

[5:21](#) Our age is characterized by sin and inevitable death; but the age to come will be characterized by grace, righteousness, and eternal life. It is common to call the ultimate struggle that is going on in the universe “the conflict between good and evil.” Paul was picturing here the outcome of the war between the Kingdom of grace and the kingdom of sin. Until Christ, the war appeared to be decided, because **sin ruled over all people**. But Christ's death and resurrection provided the decisive victory by which **God's wonderful kindness rules**. Under the reign of grace, a **right standing** is declared that will bring **eternal life**.

This ends the first section of Paul's letter and his explanation of the law and its relation to salvation. But the law is not set aside as old and worthless. Paul will explain, in coming chapters, the role of the law for believers.

## Study and Discussion Questions



### Death Through Adam, Life Through Christ - [Romans 5:12-21](#)

Topics: [Death](#), [God](#), [Grace](#), [Jesus Christ](#), [Law](#), [Life](#), [Sin](#)

#### Open It

1. What advantages and experiences have you had that many others in the world have not?
2. \*In what ways can the decisions of a few leaders change the lives of millions of people?
3. What experiences have you had with death?

#### Explore It

4. What did Adam introduce into the world and pass on to his descendants? ([5:12](#))
5. What is the root cause of death? ([5:12](#))
6. How did the coming of God's law affect the presence of sin in the world? ([5:13](#))
7. How did the coming of God's law affect our understanding of what sin is? ([5:13](#))
8. \*What came into the world through Jesus Christ? ([5:15](#))
9. What is God's solution to the inevitable problem of sin and death? ([5:16-17](#))
10. \*In what ways are the acts of Jesus and Adam similar? ([5:18-19](#))
11. What is the relationship between the amount of sin and grace in the world? ([5:20](#))
12. What effect did God's righteous law have on rebellious people? ([5:20](#))
13. What does sin in this world produce? ([5:21](#))
14. \*What does grace given by God to this world produce? ([5:21](#))

## **Get It**

15. In what ways are all people the same?
16. What fears or anticipation do you have about death?
17. What effect did Christ's death on the cross have on your life?
18. At what point in your life did you realize you were guilty of sin?
19. At what point in your life did you realize God's love for you?
20. **\*How can** God justly judge us for Adam's sin?
21. How can a person have his or her sins forgiven by God?
22. **\*What** makes Jesus' action more powerful than Adam's?
23. How can knowing you are forgiven and righteous before God through Jesus Christ affect your attitudes and actions?

## **Apply It**

24. In what ways can you thank God today for the grace He has bestowed on you?
25. **\*What** can you do this week for unsaved friends still suffering from the consequences of sin?