

## The Power of One

Romans 5:12-21

April 3, 2011

Built within the human heart is a desire to make a difference. We want to matter. We want to have an impact on the world. We want to reach our full potential. We want to leave the world a different place than it was when we found it, and hopefully better. This desire is even reflected in advertizing on occasion. We see this most clearly in the Army's recruiting plan several years ago. The United States Army moved from encouraging potential recruits to be all they could be to inviting them to be an army of one. The idea was that joining the Army would provide the recruit the training and resources he or she could use in all of his or her career in the military and in life beyond. It is an invitation to matter and be more than you are now.

Yet the world is a huge place, and the vast majority of us will only impact the small corner we inhabit. There are billions of human residents on the planet. This changes our hope to one of making as much of a positive impact as we can where we are.

There are two, and only two, men who can be said to have had a universal impact. The first was Adam. From the human perspective, Adam was the author of sin. More than just being the first person to do something against God's will, he was the first to knowingly and actively disobey a command from God.

We run into a little difficulty with the first few verses of this morning's passage. The first verse is clear enough. *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way*

*death came to all men, because all sinned-. . ."* (v.12)

At the beginning of the human story there was one man who sinned, and so sin, with its penalty death, entered the world and experience of humanity. All people know death because of that sin. Even more, all people sin. In our fallen natures, not only are we powerless to stop sinning, we do not desire to stop. Death and sin reign because **one** man, at the very start, placed himself under sin's rule. We have all lived there ever since. As we read several weeks ago, we are all under God's righteous condemnation because, *"[A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23) Paul adds that even before God gave His clear commands in full, there was sin. This is because people had already done what they knew they should not. When there were only a handful of laws, one was broken.

Paul then says something surprising. Let's look at the second half of verse 13 and verse 14 together. *"But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come."* (vv.13,14) This shows us the danger of taking one or two verses out of the Bible and using them without taking into account the contexts from which they come. It would be easy to take the last half of verse thirteen and say, "Paul says in the Bible that where there is no law sin does not count, therefore everyone who does not have the law is not a sinner." Taken with the rest of Paul's writings we know this is not the case. Especially when we look at it with verse 14 we see this. Right on the heels of this statement Paul affirms that the

results of sin reign in the world. If the result of sin prevails, we have no basis on which to say sin is not present.

We find the clue to Paul's meaning in the middle of verse 14. Paul says, "even over those who did not sin by breaking a command." This reminds us of the distinction Paul made in chapter four between a sin, which is just wrongdoing, and a transgression, which involves sinning by a direct violation of a clear command from God. Both are sin. Both are insults to the infinite and holy God and violations against Him. But the latter is still worse than the former. Paul is continuing this distinction here. It is not that people are entirely innocent when they do not have a clear word from God. It is that God holds those who have His word more accountable. Without the law, we still sin, and God still holds us accountable. The law serves to make us more aware of our sin and thus add to our **guilt**. Death reigns where there is sin. Death reigns where there are those who have not broken a direct command because, even in the absence of such commands, there is still sin.

The joy is that "Adam was a pattern of the One to come." Through Adam, one man, sin and death entered the world. In God's grace and wisdom, Adam was a pattern of the One man through whom the solution would come.

Before getting into who that "One" is, Paul gets sidetracked again. He wants to show us how the results of the gift are not like the results of the trespass. Jesus' actions are not applied the same way Adam's were.

Even as Paul gets ready to explain how the gift and trespass are different, he gets excited and cries out in praise to God for it. *"For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!"* (v.15) God's **grace** is sufficient to justify all who are being saved. Paul is really excited about this power of God's grace over the reign of sin, and with good reason. That reason lies in the difference God has shown him between the guilt all receive through Adam's sin and the righteousness that is available through Jesus and His sacrifice.

*"Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification."* (v.16) And there it is. The difference is that guilt and death came after only one sin. It was one bite of the forbidden fruit that brought the world to ruin under the domain of sin and made everybody guilty. One sin lead to condemnation for all. The **gift**, on the other hand, offers justification after many sins! This is how God's grace is more powerful than sin. One sin is enough to bring condemnation, yet God's grace can bring justification and righteousness after many sins, and willful sins against direct commands at that.

In case we didn't get the point that Jesus' gift is more powerful than the curse Adam brought, Paul tells us again. *"For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one*

*man, Jesus Christ.*” (v.17) Through Adam sin came into the world, and death came through sin. Through Jesus, not only will those who receive God’s abundant grace be made righteous, they will reign with Him. Adam and his sin brought death. Jesus and His sacrifice brought **life** and justification—right standing before God in the courtroom of heaven.

So, one sin led to the reign of sin in our world and many acts of sin followed it, confirming and securing God’s righteous condemnation. Jesus’ act was sufficient to overturn all those sins and to provide and secure God’s forgiveness and righteousness. Paul put it this way, *“Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”* (vv.18,19)

We have to be careful here that we do not read universal salvation into Paul’s thought. Jesus’ death on the cross carried the power to provide salvation to all, but the scriptures do not allow us to say that all will be saved. There is a tendency today to read this, and other passages about God’s love and grace, to mean that everyone will eventually wind up in heaven, having been covered by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross. The problem is that there are too many other passages in the scripture that speak of God’s wrath and punishment for sin, especially the eternal torment of those who reject God and His will. God is holy, righteous, and just, and He does not allow sin to go unpunished. While the

punishment for the sin of all who believe is laid on Jesus at the cross, the Bible is at pains to tell us that those who do not believe must still bear their own punishment. Paul’s point here is not that everybody will be saved. It is that God’s grace and Jesus’ sacrifice are such that they have broken the reign of **sin** and restored life where once death ruled. Through one sin many were condemned as sinners. Through one act of obedience many will be made righteous.

Paul reminds us yet again that the law was given, not so that people could ne saved, but that we might be made more aware of our sin. When we got the law sin was no longer only falling short of the glory for which we were created, it had the additional component of being in direct violation of God’s commands. But God did not stop at giving us His law. He also gave us His grace. *“The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* (vv.20,21)

This is God’s grace, that as the law brought a greater awareness of sin, and thus more guilt as the sin continued, grace is powerful enough to cover all the guilt. God’s grace outweighs the sin of all who are in Jesus Christ. While sin brings death, God’s grace through Jesus brings eternal life. Because of **one** Man, Jesus, grace reigns where sin once did. As we saw last week, the results of that are peace with God and joy in life. As we continue through Paul’s letter to the Romans we will see the implications for how we live. This morning, we should remember to be grateful for the

indescribable gift God has given us in His grace,  
provided through the power of One man, even Jesus  
Christ our Lord.