

Romans 5:18-21 In Adam In Christ –the comparison

Introduction

On Monday 7 October 2013 an extraordinary scene took place in the court of Judge Allan Davis, in Hancock County, Ohio. It concerned the decision of a previous court hearing in 1994 that a man Donald Miller, husband of a wife, father of two children, and the person who owed a large sum of money to a number of creditors, was legally dead. Mr Miller left the family home in 1986 after losing his employment and having no means to pay his debts. There was no trace of Mr Miller found by the authorities between 1986 and the court hearing in 1994. As a result of the court hearing in 1994 Mrs Miller, now a 'widow' was entitled to claim child support payments (Social Security death benefits) from the state to enable her to provide for her children. Mr Miller re-emerged from wherever he had been in 2005 and his existence was noted by the authorities when he applied that year for a driving license. He had a problem as a 'dead' person he could not regain his place in society. The case ended up in Judge Davis' court for a verdict on Monday 7 October this year. The judge with some difficulty confirmed to the man standing before him that he could not overturn the finding of the previous court that he was 'legally dead'. However, leave was given to appeal the ruling and challenge the US Social Security Administration in a Federal Court (ie at a higher national level) [BBC News website 11 October 2013]. There was no question to all concerned that the individual in court genuinely was alive and well, but his legal status was declared to the contrary. Paul in Romans 5 has been explaining our position as humanity, as two communities, one characterised by sin and guilt, the other by grace and faith. The one 'in Adam' and the other 'In Christ'. In our previous studies in Romans 5:12-21 we have seen in Romans 5:12-14 an introduction to Adam and Christ in which the former is declared responsible for the entry of sin and death into the world and who is described as *a pattern of the one to come* (Jesus Christ) (Romans 5:14b). Then in Romans 5:15-17 the two figures are contrasted. In each of the three verses the work of Christ is said to be either *not like* Adam's or *much more* successful and significant than his. In the final section of this chapter Adam and Christ are compared. Three times in these verses we have a *just as...so also* contrast between them. The sinful choice of the one compared with the righteous action of the other. The consequences of their actions have had either negative or positive benefits for the future of humanity.

1. Our justification by Gods' grace (Romans 5:18-19)

(a) The meaning of our justification in Paul's argument (Romans 5:18) *Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.* What is the meaning of this term 'justification'? Strictly speaking this legal term refers to our status before the law and only secondarily as to whether the individual concerned is a just or upright person. In biblical terms, Paul is saying, the word means, 'to declare that a person is in a place of right standing before God's law'. The apostle has already explained in Romans 4 how this has come about through the perfect righteousness of Jesus credited to our account, in the place of our guilt and sinfulness. The gift from God through Jesus is based not on our merits but on those of Jesus, therefore, an act of His grace or unmerited kindness to us. We have life in its fullness –eternal life that begins from the moment of our conversion and continues into the life beyond this life, as our inheritance in Christ. All our Christmases in one! Praise His name! However, it came about only through the righteous action of one person Jesus.

(b) **The obedience of Jesus** (Romans 5:19) ¹⁹ *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.* Paul has in effect been speaking about the obedience of Jesus and the disobedience of Adam all along, but it only here that he uses this term with reference to Jesus. In what respect can we describe Jesus as *obedient* to God the Father in His life on earth? Theologians divide it into two categories, His active obedience in His earthly life and ministry and His passive obedience through His sacrifice on the cross. First of all: (i) **The active obedience of Jesus** This concerns His submission to the law of Moses as any Jew growing up in the Holy Land at that time would be required to conform to its statutes, if he or she wished to remaining the covenant community of Israel. Remember the words of Paul in Galatians 4:4-5 that we read quite often around Christmas: *But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.* Jesus as a child and young person grew up following God's ways as understood in the Jewish community in which He was raised in Galilee. His life was without sin (Hebrews 4:15) so that when He gave His life on the cross in our place it was as *a lamb without blemish or defect* (I Peter 1:19). In everything Jesus did what was right, even offering Himself as a candidate for believers' baptism, despite this ceremony not being required of Him as a sinless person. However, wishing to set an example to us, He insisted on John the Baptist baptising Him, as Matthew 3:15 records: *Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.'* Then John consented. Jesus does not ask us to do anything that in principle He was not willing to do in His earthly life. He was determined to keep God's moral law as He understood it and did so without fault. In His baptism He identified with us, humanity, as later He would do in an altogether more profound and more significant way in His sacrifice on the cross to die in our place. In His life He actively chose the right decisions and, thereby, more than any other person who has walked this earth can invite us to be His followers. Have you taken this step of faith? (ii) **The passive obedience of Jesus** This concerns Jesus submission to the will of the Father with respect to His death on the cross. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus took His closest disciples for a time of prayer as the time drew closer to His arrest and trial in Jerusalem. Luke 22:41-43 states: *He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴² 'Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.'* ⁴³ *An angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him.* Jesus would have preferred a 'plan B' had there been any other way our salvation could have been obtained. He knew exactly what lay before Him and the enormity of the task was almost overwhelming. Yet He submitted to what the Father had asked Him to do on our behalf. It was not the physical pain and suffering that caused His greatest concerns; rather it was the separation from His Father something that He had never known at any time in His life before. Yet His conscious obedience to God's plan in contrast to Adam's conscious disobedience to God's plan enabled the Father to credit His right standing to our account so that we can have fellowship with God. His active obedience in life unlike any other human being ensured that He was able to to be the one mediator between God and man (I Timothy 2:5); the once for all time perfect sacrifice that reconciled God and humanity (Hebrews 10:14);

(c) **The transfer of our sins and His righteousness** (Romans 5:19) Isaiah 53: 4-6 contains some amazing words of prophecy about the coming Messiah, the suffering servant of God who would redeem His people from their sins. More than 700 years earlier the Prophet Isaiah was inspired by God to write: *Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.* Who supremely was responsible for Jesus

dying on the cross? God was ultimately responsible; the Jewish religious authorities, the Roman political authorities, Judas by his betrayal and our sins were responsible but Jesus fulfilled the will of God in dying in our place. In the prayer recorded in Acts 4:27-28, the Church at Jerusalem uttered these words together as a part of a collective prayer: *Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.* ²⁸ ***They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.*** To get what Paul has been teaching in Romans 5 should bring joy to our hearts to know that God loves you and me this much, to go to this length to have fellowship with us. Horatio Spafford's hymn (CMP 757 When peace like a river) which we sing occasionally in the church has this wonderful verse: My sin –O the bliss of this glorious thought!- My sin, not in part, but the whole, Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more: Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! O my soul.

2. **God's law and His grace** (Romans 5:20)

²⁰ *The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more*

(a) **Why was the law given?** Paul is conscious that a proportion of his readers and hearers in the congregation in Rome to whom this letter was sent were Jews. Some of them may have thought in the light of what Paul has written in Romans 5 that the giving by God to Moses of the Moral Law (together with the Civil and Ceremonial Law uniquely for the nation of Israel) was unnecessary, if God's plan for dealing with Adam's sin (and ours) was dealt with by Jesus alone. Orthodox Judaism then and now has taught the view that a person could be justified by keeping the law. It has devised a vast literature of advice to assist observant Jews in carrying out this duty. Paul, now a follower of Jesus takes a different view of the Law: It tells you what to do, but does not provide the necessary resources to keep it. Instead it reveals our sinful nature and the inadequacy of any attempt to live a perfect life of rule-keeping. In Romans 3:19-20 Paul wrote: *Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.* ²⁰ *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.* Romans chapter five has explained that humanity sinned in and through Adam our representative head but we are not conscious of that. The moral law of God has had the purpose of demonstrating to us in our consciences that we are by nature sinners and in need of God's salvation. No-one will seek a solution in a context where they don't believe they have an underlying problem. It is only when we are aware that we are ill that we consider whether we ought to make an appointment to see a doctor. Therefore, Paul is refreshing our minds as to what he has said already about the nature of our predicament and God's solution, prior to teaching us in Romans chapters six and seven about the implications of this good news for our Christian lives today. In summary here he wants to remind us: (i) The law defines sin for us As young children there is so much we need to learn, especially about boundaries. Parents have a duty to train their children to know about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Children and adults too in some contexts need to know that if we choose to violate the boundaries set for us that there are consequences. For a young child it might be sitting on a 'naughty step' or 'time out in a bedroom'; far better that they learn while young than face the serious consequences of criminal misconduct in adult life. Sin is only sin when we cross God's boundaries, but *where there is no law there is no transgression* (Romans 4:15). God's moral law sets the framework in which 'right' and 'wrong' choices are recognised in the human conscience. (ii) The law reveals sin's nature Sin is essentially a conscious rebellion against God. I know that this is right but I want to do....! Other people are directly affected by our actions good and bad, but ultimately our acts of sin

are against God. The best known illustration of this in the Bible is King David's sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of others including her husband to cover up his crime. David was eventually brought to the place where he acknowledged the enormity of his misconduct. Yet he also grasped that He had offended God by these appalling acts. In Psalm 51:1-4 David states these words: *Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your unfailing love; according to Your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ²Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight;* (iii) The law exposes sin's power On Thursday 17 October 2013, I heard a discussion on the radio concerning the behaviour of some young people at an approved school near Leeds, England. It had emerged that some of the children were smoking in the playground during breaks with the approval of the head-teacher. He had been concerned that if the law of the land had been upheld on school premises that the individuals concerned would simply go off the premises and be out of sight of the staff. Given that all concerned had been removed from mainstream schools for inappropriate behavioural choices it is not difficult to understand why the head made that decision. The debate centred on whether he was right to make this call. Overwhelmingly the callers, with a few exceptions, condemned this choice. The general line was that these young people are too young to smoke and should simply be ordered to stop. Yet it is not that easy to quit smoking if you have become addicted to nicotine. Some people have the willpower to cease this activity, but others might want to stop but the cravings within them to continue overcome their mental preferences! God's law reminds us that sinful choices are wrong, but human beings too often appear helpless in the face of the law's demands to honour God in our behavioural choices. Only when we recognise our inability to live a perfect moral life do we turn to Christ who loved us so much that He died in our place;

(b) The conviction of sin The law of God forces us to make choices when we know a course of action is right or wrong. If we repeatedly go against the choice our conscience declares is correct then it becomes weakened because we have overridden its appeal to our better judgement. We can do that with an alarm clock in the morning on a work day! If we deliberately ignore its sounds on enough days, in time we will sleep through it with ease. Some people deliberately harden their hearts against God despite them knowing how He wants them to live. By contrast, other people, and I hope each one of us, has the opposite response and takes heed of the call of God through our conscience and turns from our sins and makes the right choices. The greatest sin is refusing to give God first place in our lives. Has there been a time when you put Jesus first in your life? Have you turned from your sins and accepted Him as Lord and Saviour? If not, can I urge you to do that today? Paul will address this point further at some length in Romans chapter seven, but here simply highlights that the law's purpose is to highlight our need for God's grace and mercy.

(c) Grace the answer to our sin (Romans 5:20b) In the second half of Romans 5:20 Paul wrote: *But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.* Bible commentators struggled to translate these words adequately. I like Donald Barnhouse's rendering: 'Where sin reached a high-water mark, grace completely flooded the world.' [Donald G. Barnhouse, *God's Grace*, Vol.5, p. 122]. Sin in its worst forms reveals humanity's plight at its most bleak. Events like the holocaust in Nazi Germany, the genocide in Rwanda much more recently and a whole lot more acts of unspeakable evil make us wonder how rational human beings can behave with such barbarity against fellow human beings. In total contrast to such depravity, the matchless and magnificent love of God is demonstrated to the world in the gift of His amazing grace to us in Jesus. In a world of so much bad news the Gospel is God's definitive good news for us all. This verse in its rendering in the King James Version inspired the title of John Bunyan's autobiographical work: *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. It was at the heart of Paul's gratitude to God throughout his life. In an autobiographical comment in his first letter to the

Church at Corinth, he wrote: *For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.* ¹⁰ **But by the grace of God I am what I am,** and His grace to me was not without effect (I Corinthians 15:9-10). It was the truth that was central to John Newton's conversion and inspired his much loved hymn that begins: 'Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see' [CMP31] Have you ever sensed your need of God's grace? Have you ever been thrilled with a sense of wonder of His amazing love and mercy towards you? I hope each one of us can give a resounding 'yes' to this question!

3. Why did God give us His grace? (Romans 5:20-21)

²⁰ *The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,* ²¹ *so that, **just as** sin reigned in death, **so also** grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 5:18-21).

The obvious question left to answer is simply this: for what purpose did God give us this amazing grace? There are three simple answers to this question.

(a) **For our good** to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:21b) This is the same point as the best known verses in the New Testament, John 3:16-17: *For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, **that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*** ¹⁷ *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, **but to save the world through Him.*** You and I need to know that God loves you. You and I need to know that God wants the very best for you and me in our short lives here on earth. In a sinful world of disease and death; of heartaches and disappointments; of mistakes and bad choices, together with the good things that may also be our experience, God wants the very best quality of life on earth for us as His children. Paul will make this plain in Romans 8:31-32: *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* ³² *He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with Him, **graciously give us all things?***

(b) **To enable us to do good** Ephesians 2:8-10 states: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.* ¹⁰ *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*** Our salvation is a gift from God we could never earn it. However, our privilege and joy as well as our calling and duty is to pass on God's blessings to us in deeds of service to other people. Our motivation for good works can be entirely wholesome and proper, because we don't do them to earn God's favour, as if our salvation depended on it. Instead we want to serve in this way in response to His incredibly generous love towards us in Jesus. This is our motivation for Christian service. We don't do it because of the reward in heaven that awaits faithful servants of God, rather it is to please the One who has demonstrated the most incredible, sacrificial love for us. So many of the acts of kindness a person may do are behind the scenes, little things, but collectively can make a huge difference. The Gospel liberates us to be good people, for the best of reasons, to the glory of God and for the benefit of other people and the wider community, and where appropriate in the care of our natural environment on planet earth as good stewards of its resources for life. Sometimes it can be helpful to take some time out alone to reflect on our lives and ask ourselves – am I living in a way to maximise the good I can do with the life God has entrusted to me? Or ought I to reflect on some changes I need to make to be the best I can be for God?

(c) **To exhibit His grace** Ephesians 2:6-7: *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,* ⁷ *in order that in the coming ages **He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*** The purpose of His grace is ultimately for others to see something of God-likeness in us as we live a life pleasing to God. They may not have the vocabulary to articulate this truth in the way it is

described in the Bible. However, conduct honouring to God that is appreciated by other people when carried out by His children is most pleasing to our heavenly Father. This is what Paul is pointing to by his use of the unusual phrase, so that: *grace might reign...* (Romans 5:21). At the end of Romans chapter eight the apostle will list a series of obstacles and challenges believers may experience, but concludes: ... *in all these things we are **more than conquerors** through Him who loved us.* ³⁸*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,* ³⁹*neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8:38-39). Charles Wesley had grasped it to in his well-known hymn: ‘O for a thousand tongues to sing my great redeemer’s praise, the glories of My God and King, **the triumphs of His grace** [CMP496], Amen.