

Anglican Church Noosa
Romans 5:12-21 – July 5, 2026
From Grace to Glory – The Two Adams

Being the captain of the Australian Cricket Team is a great honour and a great responsibility. It is like you represent the whole of the Australian cricketing world. You don't often hear from the coach of the team, or the Chairman of the Board, or even the attendant on the ticket gate!

But the Australian Cricket Team captain, when the season is in full swing, is often in the news and speaks on behalf of the Australian Cricket.

Well Paul talks about Adam in our reading today from Romans 5, in a similar way. I doubt that Adam ever held a cricket bat but the analogy here is that he is the captain of team humanity. Or another way of expressing it, he is the representative head of humanity. He speaks on behalf of all of us, he is our representative.

Now this idea that Adam can represent us may be a little difficult for many in our culture to grasp. We live in a society which champions the individual - individual freedom, individual rights, individual privacy, the right to choose your own course in life without constraint. And there is a general distrust of institutions, especially our political institutions. So we live in a world that says you sink or swim based on your own decisions not based on belonging to a group.

In many other societies, this is not the case. In many other cultures it is not the individual that matters, it is the family, it is the community you belong to, the ethnic group or country that is all important.

In our society, I bet it would all change very quickly if we were invaded by a foreign power. All the current divisions and championing of individual rights would dissipate very quickly if we were under attack and had to defend ourselves. Our Prime Minister is our representative head now, but he would be much more in that role if we were under attack, and we would be very aware that we sink or swim together based on the decisions he and his cabinet make on our behalf. War heightens this sense of collective destiny, and collective responsibility, but of course it is present in all government decisions. And it all finds its focus in the leader – he represents the country; he represents the people.

My point here is simply that Adam speaks and acts on our behalf, he is our representative head. When Adam sinned the whole of humanity sinned. We call it the fall. When Adam fell from his privileged position in the garden of Eden, and lost his intimate relationship with God, the whole of humanity fell, and we lost our intimacy with God.

Listen to the way Paul expresses this.

V12 “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned...”

V15 “many died by the trespass of the one man...”

V 16 “the judgement followed one sin and brought condemnation...”

Notice I have skipped over versus 13 and 14 which is Paul having a little excursus about the place of the law. We have dealt with that in other passages, so we won't focus on it here.

This is really a very dense passage and to help it make sense I suggest you read v12 and then skip over to v15, you'll pick up the flow of the argument much better.

I do want to comment briefly on the end of v12. Paul says, "because all sinned". In the Greek this is what is known as the aorist tense. The aorist refers to a single past action. This verse is saying the whole human race sinned in that one past action. Adam is our representative head and we are a part of him and he is a part of us. When Adam fell, we all fell and we are all in this mess together.

However, there is good news, we have a choice. There is a new representative head who God has provided. This is a much better representative head who offers us so much more than Adam.

What are the words associated with this new representative head?

Gift (appears 5 times),

Grace (appears 3 times),

Righteousness (4 times),

Justification (2 times),

Obedience, Eternal life (once each).

All these words are in this short passage v's 12-21; and who do they refer to?

Jesus Christ!

We have a choice. Adam or Jesus Christ.

Listen to what it means to have Jesus as our representative head.

V15 "But the gift is not like the trespass... 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."

V16 "... but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification."

V17 "... 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!"

Each of these versus starts with the negative consequence of Adam's sin, and then we get the word 'but'

V15 but the gift is not like the trespass,

V16 but the gift brought justification.

And then in v17, "...how much more

will those who receive... grace... reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!"

Verse 17 points to the fact that the grace and the gift are much greater than the trespass. It says 'how much more'

The gift and the trespass are not equal. The gift brings so much more.

The start of v17 says through Adam's trespass 'death reigned'. But because of the gift of righteousness, those who receive it 'reign in life'. This little phrase 'reign in life' is an interesting one. Paul could have easily said 'life reigns'-Death reigns. Life reigns would be the direct contrast, however he changes that to say we reign in life. There is a subtle but important difference.

There are other passages in the New Testament that talk about us reigning with Christ in glory. Notably, Revelation 20:4-6, "They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."

The idea of reigning with Christ is rooted in humanity's original calling to exercise God's rule over creation in Genesis 1. Through Christ we are restored to this calling and will share in his reign when he returns. And the way it is expressed in Romans is we will reign in life. It is a glorious thought; and it reinforces how much greater is the gift than the trespass.

Verses 18 and 19 continue this contrast between the trespass and the righteous act. In v18 the trespass results in condemnation, the righteous act results in justification. In v19 the trespass is described as the disobedience of Adam contrasted with the gift of the obedience of Christ.

But what do you make of v18 where it seems to draw a direct parallel between 'the trespass condemning all people' and 'the righteous act of Christ bringing justification and life for all people?' It seems to be teaching that all people are justified and saved, a doctrine we call universalism. If you want to understand that a little more, I encourage you to read the Blog in E-News this week.

Maybe one day we'll get a chance to sit at the feet of Paul and ask him exactly what he meant by this, however I think it does make sense in his overall argument if we interpret it as all people without distinction. Especially without distinction between Jew and Gentile, without distinction between race, gender, age, or in any other way people might think of themselves.

So Paul is saying, just as the one trespass brought condemnation for all people without distinction, so the one righteous act makes justification available to all without distinction. It's available to everyone, but you still have to receive it by faith. And receiving it by faith is one of Paul's main arguments in Romans up to this point.

So we need to interpret verse 18 in a way that is consistent with the whole of Romans. And in this chapter I think we should read it as simply reinforcing the overall contrast between Adam and Christ.

So we have a choice as to who we want as our representative head – Adam or Christ. I've set the contrast up in this Table so that hopefully it might be crystal clear.

So there is Adam and there is Christ.

V's 12 & 15

ADAM	Sin which brought death to all people
CHRIST	brings Grace and the gift which overflows to many

V16

ADAM	Sin Judgement and Condemnation
CHRIST	Is the gift that brings justification

V17

ADAM	Through the trespass of Adam death reigned
CHRIST	There is an abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness. Those who receive it 'reign in life'?

V18

In ADAM	One trespass results in condemnation
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In CHRIST One righteous act results in justification

V19

ADAM Shows us the disobedience of one man

CHRIST Shows us the obedience of one man

V20

With ADAM Sin increased

With CHRIST Grace increased all the more

V21

With ADAM Sin reigns in death

With CHRIST Grace reigns through righteousness to bring eternal life

So which Head would you rather be under? Do you want to be in Adam or in Christ?

I want to finish with quotes from two luminaries who sum all of this up very well.

John Scott commenting on this passage says,

“So then, whether we are condemned or justified, whether we are spiritually dead or alive, depends on which humanity we belong to – whether we still belong to the old humanity initiated by Adam, or the new humanity initiated by Christ.”

And secondly, I want to adapt a well known quote from Tim Keller to specifically apply to this passage.

“In Adam you are more sinful than you ever dared believe.
In Christ, you are more accepted than you ever dared hope.”

Or in the language I have used,

Who do you want as your representative head? Adam or Jesus Christ?

Read through the passage again and consider the enormity of the choice.

Read the whole of the New Testament to discover the abundant grace God has given to those who are in Christ.

If this idea of moving from team Adam to team Christ is a new one for you this morning, and you really want to be on team Christ, I want to offer a prayer that can help you do that; you may like to pray this prayer.

Dear God,

I’m so sorry I have been caught up in the sin of Adam. I’ve been just going along with the world and ignoring you. And I now realise the horror of turning my back on you.

-I want to transfer my trust to Jesus Christ.

-I want to accept the gift of his righteousness, the gift of justification and life.

-I want to acknowledge Jesus as my representative head.

Please show me what it means to follow him as Lord of my life.

Please God, transform my life through this most wonderful gospel, and reveal your glory.

Amen