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**The Reign of Grace**

**Romans 5.15-17**

**Series: The Pure Gospel**

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**The Village Church**

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I. Introduction

A. It's hard to imagine a biblical concept that has captured the imaginations of the hymn writers throughout Christian history than grace

1. The very idea has caused the poetic among us to veritably gush with effusive praise

B. **Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing** (Robert Robinson)

1. Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessings

2. Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;

3. Streams of mercy, never ceasing,

4. Call for songs of loudest praise

5. O to grace how great a debtor

6. Daily I'm constrained to be!

7. Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,

8. Bind my wandering heart to Thee.

9. O that day when freed from sinning

10. I shall see Thy lovely face;

11. Clothed then in blood washed linen

12. How I'll sing Thy sovereign grace;

13. Come, my Lord, no longer tarry,

14. Take my ransomed soul away;

15. Send thine angels now to carry

16. Me to realms of endless day.

C. **All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name!** (Edward Perronet)

1. All hail the power of Jesus' name!

2. Let angels prostrate fall;

3. bring forth the royal diadem,

4. and crown him Lord of all.

5. Bring forth the royal diadem,

6. and crown him Lord of all.

7. Ye chosen seed of Israel's race,

8. ye ransomed from the fall,

9. hail him who saves you by his grace,

10. and crown him Lord of all.
  11. Hail him who saves you by his grace,
  12. and crown him Lord of all.
- D. **Amazing Grace** (John Newton)
1. Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
  2. That saved a wretch like me!
  3. I once was lost, but now am found;
  4. Was blind, but now I see.
- 
5. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
  6. And grace my fears relieved;
  7. How precious did that grace appear
  8. The hour I first believed.
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9. Through many dangers, toils and snares,
  10. I have already come;
  11. 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
  12. And grace will lead me home.
- E. There are, of course, many others
1. Our own hymnal is entitled "Celebrating Grace"
- F. And yet, in spite of these effulgent canticles, it has been my experience that, within the church in this day, how few people really grasp the significance of the grace of God
1. We view grace as a little bit of help from our Friend, who is God
    - a. For which we are appreciative
    - b. But we still have the impression that we're doing ok, by and large, without his help
  2. While we sing about grace, and pay lip service to grace, and even say we are saved by grace
    - a. We are nevertheless less than awed by grace
    - b. Even have a hard time explaining what grace is all about
    - c. Or especially how grace impacts our everyday lives
- G. You might think I'm a bit of a curmudgeon regarding grace, to speak so negatively on the subject
1. But I'm joined by others who express pretty much the same thing
    - a. And no more a prominent English theologian than the late J.I. Packer
  2. Packer: Their conception of grace is not so much debased as non-existent. The thought means nothing to them; it does not touch their experience at all. Talk to them about the church's heating, or last year's accounts, and they are with you at once; but speak to them about the realities to which the word "grace" points, and their attitude is one of deferential blankness. They do not accuse you of talking nonsense; they do not doubt that your words have meaning; but they fell that, whatever it is you are talking about, it is beyond them, and the longer they have lived without it the surer

they are that at their stage of life they do not really need it. (Knowing God, p. 117)

- H. Why this grim picture of the church's understanding of grace?
1. Packer views it as a failure to understand – and more, to feel in one's heart – four great biblical doctrines
  2. **The moral ill-desert of humanity**
    - a. Humans have an allergic reaction to their own grim spiritual conditions
    - b. And that allergy leads to a settled complacency about it
    - c. And they assume, then, that God is also complacent about their spiritual conditions
    - d. They can't imagine God caring all that much about their sin
    - e. Packer: The thought of himself as a creature fallen from God's image, a rebel against God's rule, guilty and unclean in God's sight, fit only for God's condemnation, never enters his head.
  3. **The retributive justice of God**
    - a. Packer: The idea that retribution might be the moral law of God's world, and an expression of his holy character, seems to modern man quite fantastic..
  4. **The spiritual impotence of man**
    - a. Packer: To mend our own relationship with God, regaining God's favor after having once lost it, is beyond the power of any of us.
    - b. And how few of us humans think this way
  5. **The sovereign freedom of God**
    - a. Most people think God owes them something
    - b. That if God is good, then our lives should be easy; at least easier than it is
    - c. And our expectations are that it would be easy for all of eternity – that God owes us heaven itself, for instance
    - d. Packer: The God of the Bible does not depend on his human creatures for his well-being...nor, now that we have sinned, is he bound to show us favor.... God does not owe it to anyone to stop justice taking its course.... Only when it is seen that what decides each man's destiny is whether or not God resolves to save him from his sins, and that this is a decision which God need not make in any single case, can one begin to grasp the biblical view of grace.
- I. In our study of the book of Romans we have come to Chapter 5 – a section that unfolds the great benefits of the gospel
1. The great summation of which is found in Chapter 3
  2. **Romans 3:21–25** (ESV) —
    - a. 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—

- b. 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:
    - c. 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
    - d. 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
    - e. 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith....
  - 3. We've already seen in Chapter 5 that through the gospel we have peace with God
    - a. And we have direct access to God
    - b. And we have hope in the glory of God
  - 4. And we even have benefits through our suffering
    - a. Which in the gospel produces endurance, character, and hope
    - b. And the Holy Spirit applies all of these benefits to believers by indwelling us
- J. And as Chapter 5 continues to unfold, Paul is jealous to school us in the dimensions of grace
  - 1. The same grace that has captivated the hymn writers
    - a. But which has been missed by so many in the church today
  - 2. In Romans 5.12-21 the word "grace" or the word "gift" occurs 10 times
  - 3. And in our text, which is **Romans 5.15-17**, the words occur 8 times
- K. **Romans 5:15-17** (ESV) —
  - 1. **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.**

## II. **The Two Unions**

- A. Paul's method of his instruction in this entire section is consummate pedagogy
  - 1. It is a model of the way in which people can begin to grasp the essence of any significant matter – especially of grace
  - 2. He does it by a series of comparisons and contrasts
- B. In the first part of this passage, in vv. 12-14, Paul compares two significant biblical personalities
  - 1. He compares Adam with Christ
  - 2. He says in v. 14 that Adam was a type of the "one who was to come," who of course, was Jesus
  - 3. He says that, as we saw when we studied that passage, that Adam was the representative head of the human race
    - a. And that with Adam, we all, as humans, were united

- b. And in Adam's sin, we have all sinned
    - c. And Paul unequivocally demonstrates how that must be true
    - d. Because death reigned from Adam all the way to Moses
    - e. Even though it wasn't until Moses that the Law of God was revealed
  - 4. So we have all sinned; we are all sinners
    - a. Because of Adam
- C. But since Christ came, by trusting in Christ, we are united with Him
  - 1. And have received in our account the very righteousness of Christ
  - 2. And are thus saved by our union with Christ
- D. So there are two great unions
  - 1. Our union with Adam as humans
  - 2. And our union with Christ as believers

### III. **Pervasive Grace**

- A. But for Paul to get at the heart of the significance of grace, in our text he then unfolds these truths in a series of contrasts
  - 1. In fact the text is full of a series of contrasts
  - 2. And that's why Paul is such a master teacher
    - a. We learn when we see how things are similar
    - b. And we learn even more when we see how things are different
- B. Grace, then, is best understood through a catalog of contrasts
  - 1. There is the gift of grace v. trespasses
  - 2. Sin v. righteousness
  - 3. There is the one v. the many
  - 4. There is death v. life abundant
  - 5. There is condemnation v. justification
- C. In every one of those contrasts, grace is made manifest to all those whose hearts are responsive to God's loving embrace

### IV. **Three Great Contrasts**

- A. Let's then examine this text in terms of the three great contrasts which mark the three verses
  - 1. For the text is easy to outline
  - 2. There is the statement introducing the contrasts
    - a. "But the free gift is not like the trespass." (**Romans 5.15**)
    - b. So, while Adam and Christ are alike in that both are representatives of a certain segment of humanity – natural humanity before redemption and redeemed humanity by faith in Jesus
    - c. There are differences
    - d. The free gift is not like the trespass
  - 3. So how, then, is the grace of God, the free gift of God, not like the sinful condition into which Adam has plunged the human race?
- B. **Grace for Life Eternal**

1. **Romans 5:15** (ESV) —
  - a. **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.**
2. The first contrast is **between death which came through the one man's trespass (Adam's trespass) v. the eternal life** that came as a gift of grace of the one man Jesus Christ
3. You'll recall that Adam and Eve were in probation in the Garden of Eden
  - a. And that there was but one law – they could eat of any tree of the garden – except one
  - b. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil
  - c. And if they ate of that tree, they would surely ... die!
4. And die they did
  - a. And so did all those after them
  - b. We saw that in our last message in this series
  - c. Where in Chapter 5 of Genesis, one after another of the descendants of Seth died
  - d. And as Paul demonstrated in that text – everyone else died as well even before Moses brought the Law of God
5. In fact, the way Paul put it was that **"death reigned"** from Adam to Moses
  - a. The reign of death – the universal experience of humanity is marked by death
  - b. It still is!
  - c. Death reigned – prevailed, was the relentless governor of all humanity
  - d. Death still reigns – for no matter what we do in our obsession with health
  - e. In our relentless pursuit of staving off the decline of our capacities
  - f. We all still die!
  - g. Death reigns
6. But because of the gospel, death is not the last word
  - a. Because of Christ, death is merely the gateway to life eternal
  - b. Abundant life eternal!
7. The contrast is a **"how much more"** kind of contrast
  - a. It's not just that death under Adam and grace under Christ are different
  - b. Grace under Christ is super-abundant
8. **"For if many died through the one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abound for many."**
  - a. So if you thought death under Adam was bad – and it was!
  - b. Life under Jesus is overwhelmingly good, supremely good, beyond one's imagination good
9. Many died through the one man Adam – that much is clear!

- a. Indeed, every human being
- 10. But through the one man Jesus, many live
  - a. In fact their lives abound in eternal life
  - b. In life with God
  - c. In life in union with Christ
  - d. In blessed union and love with the Triune God!
- 11. Now be careful – it’s easy to take some of the comparable terms too far
  - a. Many died through Adam
  - b. How many?
  - c. Every human being – that’s how many
- 12. But many experience the grace of God through Christ
  - a. Not every single human being like with Adam’s death
  - b. But many nonetheless
  - c. How many?
  - d. Everyone who would ever believe
  - e. Following Christ – everyone who would ever believe in Christ
  - f. Before Christ came – everyone who ever believed in the redeeming Word of God
  - g. And remember, that gospel was proclaimed even to Adam and Eve!
  - h. The promise in **Genesis 3.15** – that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent – was the first proclamation of the good news
  - i. The good news of grace!
- 13. Grace because even though Adam and Eve violated their probation, and brought on themselves and the human race the just consequences of their sin
  - a. God was gracious
  - b. And He provided the means by which sinful human beings could be saved
  - c. That’s why **Genesis 3:20** (ESV) — 20 The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.
  - d. What? Why didn’t Adam call Eve the mother of all the dead?
  - e. Because God promised a redeemer
  - f. And through the seed of the woman the redeemer of humanity would come
- 14. Adam and Eve believed in that promise
  - a. And I’m convinced they participated in the grace which abounds to the many
- 15. And even after Moses and the Law
  - a. The Law – which included the sacrificial system
  - b. Which prefigured the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world
  - c. All those who believed in the promise of redemption as illustrated in the sacrificial system

- d. All they are included in the many for whom grace abounds
- 16. So what about you?
  - a. Do you believe?
  - b. Are you one of the many for whom the free gift and the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded?
- 17. That's the grace for eternal life
- C. **Grace for Justification**
  - 1. Now – the second contrast
    - a. Between condemnation and justification
  - 2. **Romans 5:16** (ESV) —
    - a. **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.**
  - 3. The consequence of the two acts of the two representative humans are now contrasted
    - a. Again, the text reminds us – the free gift is not like the result of the one man's sin
  - 4. What happened after the one man's sin, Adam's trespass
    - a. It brought **condemnation**
    - b. God, who is holy and altogether righteous, cannot ultimately countenance sin
    - c. Eternal condemnation? Why eternal?
    - d. Because God is an eternal being – an eternally holy being
    - e. And to transgress His law is to violate His eternal character
  - 5. But grace enters the picture – and it changes everything!
    - a. The free gift following many trespasses – all the sins of those who would ever believe – brought **justification**
  - 6. And we've talked about justification, haven't we?
    - a. Justification – in which the righteousness of Jesus Christ is made available to all who will believe
    - b. The very righteousness of Christ, of which we have none!
    - c. By faith, that righteousness is placed into our account
    - d. It was counted to Abraham as righteousness when he believed
    - e. And it is counted to our account as we believe
  - 7. We are declared, at the judicial bar of justice, to be **not guilty!**
  - 8. Imagine being in the cosmic courtroom!
    - a. The place of judgment
    - b. And you're the defendant
    - c. And you know you're guilty!
    - d. And the time comes for the verdict to be read
  - 9. Imagine the relief you will experience when the Judge declares "Not guilty!"
    - a. Why, you say?
    - b. Because another has stepped in – provided the righteousness you need, and paid the penalty you deserved



- c. You are free to go!
  - 10. Not to go on sinning, of course
    - a. But free through your union with Jesus Christ
    - b. By which the Holy Spirit indwells you and enables you to fulfill the law of God by living by the Spirit and not by the flesh
    - c. (More about that from Paul later!)
  - 11. That's grace for justification
- D. **Grace to Reign**
  - 1. But then there's grace to reign
  - 2. **Romans 5:17** (ESV) —
    - a. **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.**
  - 3. Here's another of those "much more" contrasts
    - a. If you thought death reigned – prevailed, dominated – humanity as a result of Adam's sin – and it did
    - b. Through the grace of Christ, life reigns – for all eternity
    - c. **John 10:10** (ESV) — 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.
  - 4. And the grace and free gift is of righteousness
    - a. The same righteousness that came through faith in Jesus to all who believe
    - b. The same righteousness that is placed into our account through justification
  - 5. But more than that – it is a righteousness which begins to reign and dominate in our own lives through the Spirit of Jesus who lives in us!
    - a. **Romans 8:3–4** (ESV) — 3 ... By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
    - b. **Romans 8:13–14** (ESV) — 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.
  - 6. Let's talk for a moment about reigning
    - a. **Kings reign**
    - b. Rulers reign
    - c. Caesars reign
    - d. Monarchs reign
  - 7. Reigning involves **authority**
    - a. It involves the right to rule, the right to obligate subjects
  - 8. Reigning also involves **power**
    - a. The capacity to enforce those obligations

9. And reigning implies **obedience** on the part of the monarch's subjects
  - a. Because if you don't obey, you are subject to whatever punitive consequences are assigned by the reigning monarch
10. Apart from Christ, death reigns
  - a. But in Christ, **"those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ"**
11. "Through... Jesus Christ"
  - a. There it is again – union with Christ
  - b. We cannot experience His grace apart from our union with Him
12. And when we come to Christ we no longer have to obey the previous monarch
  - a. The reign of death is over
  - b. Oh, we still will experience physical death
  - c. But even now, we experience new life in Christ
13. And as a result, we find ourselves subservient to the most benevolent of monarchs
  - a. The only monarch who has our best interests at heart
14. **Romans 8:28** (ESV) —
  - a. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
15. **Romans 8:32** (ESV) —
  - a. 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
16. That's the monarch we now are able to obey
  - a. Able?
  - b. Yes, able – because
  - c. **Romans 8:10** (ESV) — 10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.
17. The reign of grace in Jesus Christ is more than the icing on the cake
  - a. It is the astonishing delight of living in the kingdom of love and light!
18. **Colossians 1:13** (ESV) —
  - a. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son...
19. Someone explained it like this
  - a. What's it like to be transferred from one kingdom to another?
20. Once a man who was a career officer in the military finally retired and was honorably discharged
  - a. Soon after, he ran into his commanding officer in the grocery store
  - b. He immediately stood at attention and saluted the officer
  - c. But then he realized that he no longer had to do that

- d. He was not subject to that officer's authority, power, and capacity to obligate obedience
- 21. The man could, instead, serve his new commander
- 22. That's what happens when grace reigns
  - a. We no longer have to salute to the reign of death
  - b. To the reign of the enemy of our souls
  - c. To the reign of our flesh
  - d. To the reign of the world's influences
- 23. We salute to a new commander
  - a. To Jesus Christ
  - b. King of kings and Lord of lords
- 24. That's grace to reign

V. **Abounding Grace**

- A. **Romans 5:17** (ESV) —
  - 1. 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.
- B. Grace is "much more" than death, than condemnation, than the reign of the evil one
  - 1. Grace is abundant in the believer
  - 2. That's what the hymn writers understood
  - 3. That's what we need to understand
- C. Spurgeon: What an abyss is the grace of God! Who can measure its breadth? Who can fathom its depth? Like all the rest of the divine attributes, it is infinite. God is full of love, for 'God is love.' God is full of goodness; the very name 'God' is short for "good." Unbounded goodness and love enter into the very essence of the Godhead. It is because 'his mercy endureth forever' that men are not destroyed; because 'his compassions fail not' that sinners are brought to him and forgiven." (All of grace, p. 41)