**Lesson 12: Reign of Grace > Reign of Sin**

Text: Romans 5:12-21

**Introduction**

The blessings of justification by faith are evident in all that we have in Christ Jesus. (Romans 5:1-11) To explain how these blessings were secured, Paul traced the history of redemption from Adam’s sin to Christ’s atonement. Christ’s obedience is sufficient to overcome the effects of Adam’s disobedience! Warren Wiersbe said it well, “In Christ Jesus we have gained much more than we ever lost in Adam!” Paul celebrates the fact that the reign of grace is greater than the reign of sin in the life of the believer. The word “reign” appears five times in this passage. (v. 14, 17, 21) It means “to rule, control completely” (Friberg). Prior to salvation, our lives were dominated by the reign of sin and death. Since salvation, our lives are blessed by the reign of grace and eternal life.

The truth in this passage can be challenging to understand and yet rewarding to embrace. Paul begins a comparison in verse 12 that he does not complete until verse 19. In this lesson, we will endeavor to follow Paul’s flow of thought to see that the reign of grace and life is greater than the reign of sin and death. The brevity of our study will not allow us to answer every question arising from the passage, but we will focus on the central truth and apply it to daily living.

1. **Central Idea: Because the reign of grace is greater than the reign of sin, we can be assured of salvation through Jesus Christ. (v. 12-21)** 
   1. The reign of sin and death entered through the first man, Adam. (v. 5:12a) God gave Adam clear boundaries in the Garden of Eden. He was allowed to freely eat of all the trees except “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (Gen. 2:17) Adam disobeyed God’s one command and thus death entered into the world. Obviously, Adam continued living until his physical death, meaning Paul had more in mind than simply physical death. Spiritual death occurred when Adam sinned, separating him from God. Instantly, he was in need of redemption and the atonement. Thus, sin has permeated society.
   2. Death passed upon all men because all have sinned. (v. 5:12b) The point we are to understand is that “death is universal because sin is universal…No one escapes the reign of death because no one escapes the power of sin.” (Douglas Moo)
   3. What is intended by the phrase “all have sinned”? “The Greek past (aorist) tense occurs in all three verbs in this verse. So the entire human race is viewed as having sinned in the one act of Adam’s sin.” (Bible Knowledge Commentary) There are various views that are offered to this question that are beyond the scope of our discussion today. We will briefly deal with this issue in order to remain focused on Paul’s central idea. It is obvious that all people sin. It is only the self-deceived who think they have never sinned (1 John 1:8). A comparison of verse 12 with verses 18-19 reveals that Paul’s focus is not just on what continues to happen, but what happened the day Adam sinned in the garden.
   4. Participation in Adam’s sin has been described in two ways:
      1. The Federal Headship view states that Adam was the representative of the whole human race. His act of disobedience and its penalty were applied to all people. The problem with this view is that it calls God’s justice into question. In this view, God punishes men for a sin they did not commit.
      2. The Seminal or Natural Headship view states that we were physically in Adam and thus participated in the sin. While this sounds strange to us, it has biblical grounds in the doctrine of creation and the example of Levi. In Hebrews 7:9-10, the Bible records that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek while he was still in the loins of Abraham. What?! No, really. It’s in the Bible. Therefore, it is possible to understand Paul’s reference in Romans 5:12 to mean that all of us sinned in and with Adam. We are not held accountable for Adam’s sin. We are accountable for our sin. “It was not personal sin, but it was real sin. The nature which I now possess, fallen and guilt worthy, is the same nature that corrupted itself in Adam; not only the same in kind, but the same as flowing to me from him” (Ray Pratt).
      3. The main focus in this text is on the reigning power of sin and death. If a person is drowning in a raging river, the immediate need is to find a way out, not to figure out how he fell in! The continuation of Paul’s letter demonstrates our only way out!
   5. Some may object that man could not be held accountable in the absence of specific laws. (v. 13-14)
      1. Although man did not sin like Adam against specific commandments from God, sin was obviously present. The existence of sin is made evident by the reign of death. (v. 14a)
      2. Paul said that Adam was a “figure” (a type) of the One who was to come, Jesus. (v. 14b)
   6. The comparison between Adam and Christ is a contrast rather than an exact parallel. This is obvious from the repeated phrase, “not as.” (v. 15-19)
      1. The offense brought death. The grace of God brought life to all who would believe. (v. 15)
      2. Judgment came by Adam’s one offense to condemnation. We see in this verse the destructive nature of just one sin! The free gift is available to sinners who have sinned on numerous occasions! Grace is greater than many sins! (v. 16)
      3. Death reigned by one man’s offense. Greater still is the abundance of grace to reign in life by Jesus Christ. (v. 17)
      4. One man’s offense brought condemnation. One Man’s righteousness brought justification and life. (v. 18)
      5. By participating in one man’s sin many were made sinners. By the obedience of Jesus’ death on the cross many may be made righteous! (v. 19)
   7. Paul returned to his discussion of the law to explain that it was given to underscore the seriousness of man’s sin. (v. 20a)
   8. Although sin abounds, grace super abounds! (v. 20b-21) The hope we have in Jesus Christ is that the reign of sin and death has been destroyed. By simple faith in His finished work on the cross and by the power of His resurrection, grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. (v. 21)
2. **Application: You can be assured of salvation through Jesus Christ because the reign of grace is greater than the reign of sin.**
   1. Because all people sinned in Adam, there is ultimately no hope apart from the reign of grace through Jesus Christ. Human solutions to human depravity will end in frustration. Sin is too powerful for sinners to break its reign. Jesus Christ, Who knew no sin, is the only solution for a world under the reigning power of sin.
   2. Do you view yourself as hopeless? The reign of grace is greater than the reign of sin.
   3. Do you look at others without hope? Don’t underestimate what the reign of grace can do!

**Conclusion**

One sin is enough to send a sinner to hell. The fact of our lives reveals that we sin on multiple occasions. Can such sinners produce an act or acts of righteousness that will cancel out the wrong they have done? The answer is obviously, “No!” You need a sinless substitute. There is only One! His one act of obedience on the cross is powerful enough to cancel the sin debt of all who will believe! The Reign of Grace > The Reign of Sin.