

## The Reign of Grace

Romans 5:21

KV 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.”

If you asked someone, “Do you think you are living under the reign of sin?”, what answers would you expect? Someone might say, “Who says *“reign”* anymore?” Another person might say, “I live under the reign of Barak Obama.” Still others might say, “Reign of sin, what are you talking about? Sin is for Christians, I don’t believe in that stuff.” Ask yourself that question, am I living under the reign of sin? We all at one point in time, if not right now, live under the reign of sin. How could you tell? Because sin reigns in death. *Sin is the ultimate cause and reason for death.* Smoking accounts for 5 million deaths worldwide per year, about 443,000 in the US, which is about 1 in 5 people here. As of 2009, 13,000 people were killed in drunk driving accidents in the US. But sin accounts for 100% of all deaths worldwide, for all time. As we hear about bloody wars or tragic natural disasters, it’s not a stretch to say that the world is full of death. There is an answer to all this, a solution to the problem: and that is *grace* – and when I say grace I mean the grace of God. God’s grace gets to the heart of the issue: our sin, and deals with it. It is God’s grace that gives us hope in a triumph over sin and death, and bestows upon us life, and not just life – but life abundant, to the full, and life everlasting. Let us desire then, to come out under the reign of sin, and into the reign of grace. Through this passage, we’ll look at the reign of sin, so we can understand our current or original state. Next, we’ll explore the reign of grace, and how that leads to true and everlasting life. And finally, we’ll find out how we can receive the grace offered to us by God.

### Part I: The Reign of Sin

We take for granted the fact that *people die*. We are often very impressed when someone lives over 100 years old. I believe my great grandmother lived to 102 or 104. If you ask most people in the world, “Where does death come from?”, they might have an answer, or say, it’s a natural part of life. But the Bible tells us clearly where death comes from - look at v.12, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.” Sin entered the world through one man – the first man to ever live on the earth – Adam. God created the world full of beauty – from majestic mountaintops to magnificent waterfalls, and full of the variety of plants and animals. After creating these, he made mankind, so that they would rule over the birds of the air, the fish of the sea and all the animals that move along the ground. He blessed them to fill the earth and subdue it. The first man God created was Adam, and he put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. It was here God commanded him, “You are free to eat to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die (Gen 3:16).” There it was – the command, and the consequences. From the beginning it was not God’s intention for Adam to die, but here God states clearly if Adam violates the command, he will certainly die.

As many of you know the story, a serpent came to deceive Eve by casting doubt on God’s word, saying (paraphrasing), “Did God really say? Did he really? What? You won’t die, that’s ridiculous. He’s just trying to hold it back from you, because he knows when you eat it, you’ll

be like God.” So Eve was tempted, seeing that it could give her more wisdom, that fruit suddenly looked more delicious. She took the fruit and ate it, and gave some to her husband, and he ate it. That’s the point sin entered into the world – when Adam and Eve *disobeyed* the command of God and ate of the fruit of the tree. Immediately their eyes were opened, and they saw their shame, and tried to hide. When God found them, he questioned them, “Have you eaten from that tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” Rather than owning up to the fact they disobeyed, Adam tried to blame Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. They knew they had done something wrong. God then pronounced a curse on the serpent, and then on Eve and then to Adam, saying, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat from it...it will produce thorns and thistles for you...By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and dust you will return (Gen 3:17-19).” Because of Adam’s sin, the earth was cursed – he would now have to work hard to eat, and the ground will produce weeds. Before this, perhaps taking care of the garden was enjoyable, it was a delight, but after the fall, it became toilsome labor. Maybe before this there were not even weeds in the Garden. But most tragic of all is the sentence of death for his sin, “for dust you are and dust you will return.”

*So this is sin: disobedience to God.* Why was this so severe, why did it require death? As we saw in the beginning, God made everything perfect, everything beautiful. He then created man in his own image. The glory of God was in Adam in the beginning. He was perfect, righteous and holy, just as God was. But when he disobeyed, he *corrupted* the glory of God that was in him. He *ruined* the image of God he was given – he now fell short of the glory of God. Falling short does not mean he was only slightly off – falling short means he no longer has God’s glory. This sin, this ruin of the image of God, is a *violation* of the good that was originally put into Adam, which then makes room for evil to enter. That is why the offence is punishable by death. Moreover, not only does sin require death, it also *results* in death. Sin results in a separation from God – the source of our life. When we are cut off from the source of life, we die. It’s like a laptop, when you pull out the plug from the wall, it can only run for a few hours - if it is not connected again it shuts down.

Now that sin entered the world through one man, it spread to all people, and death came to all, because each one sinned. It did not take long for sin to spread. Like a little bit of yeast in a batch of dough, it works its way all the way through. See how fast the effects of sin took place: Adam and Eve gave birth to two boys – Cain and Abel, and in the course of time Cain murdered Abel. It only took one generation for the first homicide. About 1,000 years later, around the time of Noah, “The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time (Gen 6:5).” There is a saying, “the apple does not fall far from the tree,” which means that children are usually inherit the character traits of their parents. I knew of some people who had a gambling problem, and when their children grew up they had the same problem. Likewise, because of Adam’s sin, the whole world, down to you and me, are *sinners from birth*, because we inherited sin from Adam.

Some of the Jews who might read Paul’s letter may say – “How can you convict anyone of sin before Moses’ time? Moses gave the law, and from that law we can convict people of sin, but without the law, you can’t convict anyone.” Paul addresses this issue – see v.13, “To be

sure, sin was in the world, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law." This is true – *you need a law in order to charge a violation* against someone. If there is no speed limit law on the highway, then I cannot get pulled over for violating the speed limit. By the law, Paul is referring to the Ten Commandments. He is saying true, you cannot charge someone without a law – but look at the facts. See v.14, "Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come." The fact is, people were still dying even though they did not break the law. Why? Because they were breaking natural laws. They were not breaking the Ten Commandments specifically, but they were breaking the natural laws written on their hearts and consciences (Rom 2:14). For example, think about anyone who is not a Christian, or a Jew, who might know these commandments. If you ask most people what they think about murder, or stealing, they will tell you instantly that it is wrong. There is a natural law written into everyone's heart.

Here is the fact – death reigned because of Adam's sin, so even if we did not break the specified Ten Commandments, *we are still sinners*. Someone might say, "Why am I being punished for Adam's sin? I'm innocent!" No they are not, they are being punished for *their* sins. Or someone might say, "I'm not a sinner, so far as I know.." but 1 John 1:8 says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." We have inherited Adam's sin, and we are sinners from the time we are in our mother's womb (Ps 51:5). No one needs to teach us how to sin, it is inherent in our natures. When I was a boy in third grade, I loved to tell lies – I don't know why, but maybe it was the attention. I claimed to know how to write and speak Chinese and Japanese, and I knew kung fu and karate. The truth is I knew none of that, and I almost got caught one time when someone asked me to write some Chinese in front of a group. Some comments in some study Bibles say, "we are not sinners because we sin, but we sin *because we are sinners*." Through Adam, sin came into our lives, and because of our sins we will be punished with death – but not just death in this life, but death in the next life as well. We do not disappear into a void, but because of our evil we cannot even dwell with God in heaven, and will be cut off for all eternity, punished for the sins we committed. This is the second death. But there is a solution, and there is a power far greater than the power of sin– so now let's turn to:

## **Part II: The Reign of Grace**

*It is God's grace that is greater than all the world's sin.* Now look at v.15, "But the gift is not like the trespass. 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!" See how God's grace overflows! Notice the "how much **MORE**." By Adam's sin, we were separated from God and destined for death. But God's grace overflowed to reach us. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10). Jesus came down from heaven to carry out the work of God! Adam's work resulted in death, but how much greater is the work of our God! Not only did the grace overflow *to* us, but how much more does that grace overflow *IN* us! Isaiah exhorts us (Isa 55:7) "Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon." Turn to our Lord Jesus Christ, he will have mercy on you: this was demonstrated to us on the cross. Turn to

our God, the Father of our Lord, and he will freely pardon. **FREELY** pardon. There is no sin too great that you have committed in the past, if you will forsake your wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts and turn to Him. There's a story I think our church founder used to tell about a Korean man, a Christian, who forgave a soldier who killed his son, and adopted that soldier as his own. The man had faith that his dead son was in heaven, and the soldier, now converted, repented of his sin. God would also forgive him and welcome him into heaven through Jesus Christ. There is no sin too great that God cannot forgive, and it overflows to others.

Again the grace of God is greater than sin – can we please look at v.16, “Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.” One sin could bring on condemnation – it seems like one sin is pretty powerful. James 2:10 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all.” As Sh. Bob says, there are many laws, but you only have to break one to go to prison. But now see how wide the grace and mercy of God is: the gift followed *many* trespasses and brought justification. One sin could throw us deep into death, but grace can justify *every sin committed by every person for all time*. I think that grace could span the entire volume of the universe. The apostle Paul confessed in 1 Tim 1:15, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst.” Why did he say that? Because for the sake of his pride and anger he killed Christians. He had pride, anger, jealousy, hatred, covetousness, you name it, yet Christ Jesus showed him mercy, that he might display His immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life (1 Tim 1:16) – and this promise is for all who would believe – you, and me.

And finally one more example of the superiority of grace – please look now to v.17, “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 the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!” Through Adam’s sin, think about how much death reigns in us. *Our actions lead to death*. We will all go through physical death, because we are still in this body. But as we continue to sin, it leads to moral death, a loss of discernment between good and evil – and that will only make our spiritual and second death more sure and severe. They say that criminals usually start small – a little shop lifting here and there – and if they don’t stop they can end up moving on to more serious crimes. In sin, death reigns – but *how much more will those who receive grace reign in life!* Jesus says that he has come that we may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10). How do we reign in this life? What is life to the full? Last week, we learned about peace, joy and hope – these are great gifts in themselves. We have freedom from our sins, and grow in our self control. Not only do we enjoy a restored life, but 1 Pet 2:9 says, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light.” Our lives are not hindered by sin, but they are given a peace, a joy, a contentment, a hope about them, and we are called priests: servants of God who pray for others. This is life abundant and to the full.

What’s more, we continue to reign in life right on into the next life. Rev 20:6 says, Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power

over them, but they will be priests of God and Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.” According to revelation, even in the next life, we will reign with Christ! When the Garden of Eden is restored, again according to Rev 22:3,5 “There will be no more curse ... There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.” When we are under the reign of grace, we shall *reign in life* – both in this life and the next! Now the question is:

### **Part III: How Shall We Receive God’s Grace? (or, How Shall We Receive God’s Gift?)**

The word “gift” was mentioned many times in v.15-17: “gift not like the trespass; gift that came by grace; gift followed many trespasses; and the gift of righteousness.” The gift comes by grace. Gift-giving is by grace; a gift is not something we earn, but an act of favor and kindness given to us freely. What happens when your friend gives you a Christmas gift, and you give him back \$20 and say, “Thanks for your trouble buddy.” Your friend will get offended. A gift should be received with *thanksgiving*. Nor do you try and earn it – for example, you drive your friend around, and on Christmas you hold out your hand and say, “Where’s my gift buddy?” He may not be your buddy for long. We do not receive God’s gift by the works of our hands. Look at v.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.” God’s gift is justification and life for all people. *God’s gift is righteousness* that is given to us. This was achieved by one righteous act, but notice who did it (v.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.” The one man brought righteousness to us. That one man is not any of us. He is not any of you. *That one man is Jesus Christ*. Notice how the gift of God has nothing to do with what we’ve done, but it has everything to do with what Jesus has done.

The gift of God is not given to us by our works – *but by our faith Jesus Christ* and what he has done for us. We were disobedient. Sin is disobedience – but by Christ’s obedience many will be made righteous. It was both Christ’s perfect obedience in his sinless 33 years on earth, and also his ultimate obedience to God to be *slain for the sin of the world*, which brought us peace and righteousness. 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 (John 3:16). Christ’s sacrifice satisfied God’s wrath against all of our sins. Our sins were credited to him on the cross, but on that same cross, his righteousness was credited *to us*, so that He is the object of our faith.

Why do we need righteousness? Look at v.20-21, “This law was brought in 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.” Again, here we have the superiority of grace. The law multiplies our sins. As we grow in our knowledge of the Lord and his word, we become more and more *convicted* of how sinful we are. When God convicts us of our sins, we turn to him, and here we find that *grace increases* to cover over our sin. We don’t sin more for more grace, which will be covered next week, but as the law continually convicts our hearts, more sins are revealed to us. As they are revealed, we can continually come to God. We no longer are under the reign of sin, but grace reigns in our lives to bring eternal life. And notice in v.21 how it works – *grace reigns*



*through righteousness.* When we have the righteousness of Christ, grace works in us to bring us eternal life – that full, abundant and everlasting life.

As a conclusion, may I exhort you to live under the reign of grace. For those who are living under the reign of sin, please put your faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, that you might receive the gift of righteousness where grace may reign. For those of us who believe already, I would like to share what I read in an article entitled “The Riches of Grace in Christ Jesus,” written in 1917 by Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of the Dallas Theological Seminary. He lists about 33 points that are given, perfect and complete and instantly possessed by the believer for all eternity. For example, one point sonship (being a child of God) – sonship does not grow into fuller sonship, even though a son may be growing, in other words, an old man is no more a child of God then when he was born. From that perspective, a Christian’s conduct should be inspired by the fact that he is already saved and blessed with all the riches of Christ Jesus, and *from there, live a life worthy of that calling.* In the interest of time, I will only list 11 of these points (and include a link at the end), just to show the abundance of blessing God gives to us the moment we believe. The riches of God’s grace are immediately given to us in...

- Reconciliation
- Redemption
- Atonement for sins
- Union with Christ,
- Free from the law
- Children of God
- Acceptable to God
- Justified
- Forgiven
- Having access to God
- Citizens of heaven
- and 22 more!

Such are the riches and abundance of God’s grace given to us through Jesus Christ!

Article link:

Chafer, Lewis Sperry. "Assurance of Salvation," *Salvation*. Blue Letter Bible. 16 Sep 2002. 28 Oct 2012.  
<[http://blueletterbible.org/study/misc/div\\_rich.cfm](http://blueletterbible.org/study/misc/div_rich.cfm)>.