

RETURN ENGAGEMENTS: GETTING IT RIGHT THE SECOND TIME

Sixth in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *Let's Look at God* from Romans 5:1-21

"The free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many."

Romans 5:15

In 1547 at age 72, Michelangelo began carving what is known today as the *Florence Pieta*. The word *pieta* means *pity* or *piety*. Thirty-five years earlier the master artist had awed the world with his frescos on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Now, at the peak of his skill and fame, he undertook the most ambitious marble carving of his career. He intended it to adorn his own tomb. It would be, he hoped, his greatest sculpture ever.

The *Pieta* features four larger-than-life figures. At the center is the lifeless body of Christ. On the right is Mary, the mother of Jesus, grieving for her son. To the left is the grateful, redeemed sinner, Mary Magdalene, embraced by Christ's limp right arm. And behind them, leaning over the others, helping to convey Christ's gift to humanity, stands Nicodemus, the secret disciple. Michelangelo carved his own face on Nicodemus. For in John 3 Jesus had told Nicodemus that salvation comes only by faith in him, and Michelangelo understood. He, the great artist, had been saved by faith. And he wanted the world through this work likewise to understand and receive the grace of God.

The years passed, eight of them. And the genius Michelangelo couldn't get it right. A piece of marble broke off of Mary's arm. Michelangelo discovered a crack that ran through the block of stone. And a servant nagged him continually, "When are you going to finish it? You need to get back to work on the *pieta!*" Michelangelo grew to hate the sculpture, and finally he'd had it. He grabbed a hammer and attacked the carving, hacking off both of Christ's arms and his left leg. Another servant begged him to give the *pieta* away rather than destroy it. A pupil reattached the arms and finished carving the figure of Mary Magdalene. And so it stands today in a museum in Florence—a restored masterpiece.

Last Sunday we saw God's greatest creation, the man Adam, destroyed by sin. There had been a period of probation. All Adam and Eve had to do was *not* eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they obeyed they would have secured for themselves and for all their descendants forever, eternal life and all the glories and perfection of the garden. But they had eaten. Judgment fell. God expelled them from Eden and set an angelic guard at the gate so no man could ever enter there again. Over these past weeks we've been taking a fresh look at God. We've discussed God's attributes. We've observed his goodness. Last week we saw his justice. Today we're going to view the most incredible and amazing thing about God that the world has ever seen. We're going to explore God's infinite grace and mercy.

Turn with me to the fifth chapter of Romans. The apostle Paul expresses the amazing truth in the first part of the chapter. In verse 6 he says, "*While we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.*" In verse 8 he says, "*While we*

were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” In verse 10 he says, “*While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.*” This is the reality that Michelangelo was trying to communicate through his *Florence Pieta*. But the magnitude of God’s grace is too great. That’s why Michelangelo was frustrated.

In the TV program, *24*, just three hours back, super agent Jack Bauer discovers that his own brother had betrayed him to the Chinese who imprisoned and tortured him for two years. He forces his brother to admit that he was the mastermind behind the assassination of the President of the United States, that he’s working with Islamic terrorists, and that he’s helped them obtain five tactical nuclear bombs. They’ve already exploded one of them in Los Angeles, killing thousands of people. Jack is enraged. He teeters on the brink. He wants to kill his brother. Tune in tomorrow night as Jack Bauer, without going to the bathroom or eating a bite of food for twenty-four hours, races to save America. But here’s the point: Paul says that Jesus, facing just such a sociopathic enemy. Instead of killing him, however, Jesus gave up his own life to save him. Friends, you and I are the murderous brother, and yet Jesus saves us!

This is such an amazing thing that very often when we read Romans 5 we stop with verse 11 and simply bask in the glory of the grace of God. But Paul doesn’t stop. In the verses that follow, verses 12 to 21, Paul does with words what Michelangelo couldn’t do with stone. He chisels out the full expanse of God’s grace, and leaves us gasping at its immensity. Come with me now and follow Paul through this next section, hammer blow by hammer blow, until the vast mercy contained in Jesus’ death stands fully exposed.

Paul says in verse 12, “*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned....*” We saw this last week. God appointed Adam as the federal head of the human race. Until the moment Adam ate the forbidden fruit there was no sin in the world. It was a perfect, beautiful, harmonious place where everything was as God had created it. But when Adam broke God’s simple commandment, it all changed. Sin and disobedience marred the creation. It was as if Adam had taken a hammer and hacked away at God’s creation. And just as God had warned, death for the first time became reality. Adam wasn’t struck down immediately. But the process of dying began, like an injection of poison into the system, bit by bit taking over the organism. Sin is a fatal illness, and a very contagious illness. Every human being born from Adam and Eve contracts the contagion. Notice the phrase, “*because all sinned.*” Every one of us bears the sin of Adam. David puts it this way in Psalm 51:5: “*I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.*” We each are born with an innate tendency to sin. And as a result, we all do sin.

In verse 13 Paul says, “*For until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law.*” Paul is referring here to the Law of Moses. Moses climbed to the top of Mt. Sinai while the people of Israel waited below. And there on the mountain top God gave him the tablets of stone on which he had written the Ten Commandments. For the first time sin was defined, and people could now be convicted of committing certain sins. But sin existed in the world before that. People have rebellious hearts. They say and do evil things even if there is no law that expressly says

such a thing is sin. For example, until a few years ago identity theft wasn't much of a problem. People didn't use credit cards. People didn't have social security numbers. And money existed primarily in the form of hard currency. So we didn't have laws forbidding someone from looting another person's electronically stored assets. But when the first person to misrepresent himself as someone else, used that person's credit card, it was still wrong even though no law said so. That's Paul's point.

Verse 14: *“Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.”* There are three things to notice here. First, Paul proves that sin existed even if there was no law written against something. God said to Adam, “In the day you eat the forbidden fruit, you shall surely die.” Paul says, what happened? Everybody who has ever lived since Adam has died. If the death penalty is imposed, it can only mean that every person has sinned.

Second, notice that included in those who die are those *“who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam.”* What was the offense of Adam? It was deliberately breaking the command of God. Who is there who has not broken God's commandments? You say, “Everybody has.” No, not everybody. What about babies? Our granddaughter Ashley is two and a half. You know what two year olds can be like. We were visiting our son and his family a few weeks ago when Ashley's daddy told her to do something she didn't want to do. She went into a tirade and sat in her high chair and blessed him out for a good minute and a half. Couldn't understand a word she was saying, but there was no doubt about the meaning! Did she know it was wrong to do such a thing? Of course. But she did it anyway. So she was guilty of breaking a command. She sinned in the likeness of Adam's sin. But what about her sister Lauren who is three and a half months old and lies there smiling and cooing at people. Can she sin like Adam did? No, for she has no idea of right and wrong. And yet, babies die, don't they? I've buried a few. They've been guilty of no sin of their own, and yet the death penalty was applied, which means that they bear guilt—the guilt of Adam's sin. Take this a step farther. Here is one of the indications in Scripture that children who die before they are capable of trusting in Jesus as their Savior, nevertheless are saved by Christ and will be in heaven. The penalty for sin applied before they had committed any sin, and the application of Christ's salvation applies, even though they have not exercised faith. It's another example of God's abundant mercy.

Notice one final thing, and it's with this statement that Paul moves from judgment to God's grace. He says Adam is a type of Christ. In other words, Christ stands in the same position as Adam did. Adam represented the whole human race. His sin affected us all. So also Jesus represents the whole human race, and his payment for sin affects us all. This is what Paul says in verse 15. *“But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man Jesus Christ abound to the many.”* Paul says Christ's gift and his grace are greater than Adam's destructive sin. Let me ask you, which is easier, to destroy something or to build something? To destroy, right? Only a few can create a priceless work of art. Any idiot can destroy one. Did you hear about

that guy who paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for a painting by Picasso? He got it home and then by accident stuck his elbow through it. He'll bring in art experts who will try to repair the painting, but it will always have a hole and a patch. Its value will never be equal to what the man paid for it originally. Adam destroyed the human race. Jesus picks up the broken pieces one by one and restores them, and puts humanity back together, as good as new.

Verse 16: *“And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification.”* Adam committed one sin and the rest of us followed him and committed sins of our own. You and I were condemned before we even gave a thought to our condition. When it finally begins to dawn on you that the path you're on only leads to destruction it's already too late. You can't undo the sins you've already done. But look what Jesus did! Add up all the billions and billions of sins men and women and boys and girls have committed. Jesus offers a gift of forgiveness. What we could not do ourselves, Jesus does for us. All we need is to receive it. When we do, Paul says Christ justifies us. We use the word *to justify* when we must give an account of our actions. “Why did you do such and such?” the court asks the accused. And these days the defense attorney offers many creative excuses. “His parents abused him. He grew up in poverty. The education system failed him. McDonalds loads their fast food with fat.” But common sense says, “None of that justifies what you did. You must accept personal responsibility.” Jesus credits us with his personal record of perfect obedience. History doesn't change, but when we are measured against the law of God, we find that we are justified. That is, we meet the standards that God's law requires. Jesus makes us legally perfect, and he goes to the cross to pay for our sins.

Verse 17: *“For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.”* Before we came to Jesus, the only thing we could look forward to was death. Come early or come late, you are going to die. But if you receive the grace of Christ and if you receive forgiveness for your sins as a gift from him, then you are going to live, not die. You know, one of the criticisms of the war in Iraq that is so off the wall, is the complaint that because of the advances in medical treatment, a large number of soldiers who would have died are in fact saved. But the complainers say, “Look at the terrible injuries and handicaps these soldiers will have to bear for the rest of their lives.” Ask those soldiers. Would you prefer to be dead from your battlefield wounds, or would you prefer to be alive, even though you suffer physical damage? Ask their moms and dads and wives and sweethearts which they'd prefer. I dare say the overwhelming majority would pick life, even life that is hard. But suppose that medical science progresses so far that not only can we save those lives, we can completely restore every mangled limb, erase every scar and disfigurement. And not only that, suppose the U. S. government provided each wounded soldier with compensation for suffering and paid millions of dollars every year for life and decreed that these soldiers will be given medals and honored as long as they live? That's in effect what Jesus does for those he saves. They don't just survive. They reign in life forever.

Verse 18: *“So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.”* In other words, Jesus, acting in the role of the second Adam, the second representative of the human race, completely undoes the damage and destruction that Adam caused. When Paul says that *all* men experience justification through Jesus’ death on the cross, understand that he is using the word *all* in this case not to mean each and every individual human being. Rather he uses the word *all* in the same way we sometimes use it. For example, if you fellows are having a fight with your wife, she may say to you, “You always do such and such!” What is your answer? Don’t you protest, “I may do that sometimes, but not *all* the time!” There are two ways we use the word. So here Paul uses the word *all* to refer to huge numbers of the human race, representing every culture and every nation, people from every age of history. The church of Christ extends across the world and includes hundreds and hundreds of millions of people!

Verse 19: *“For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.”* The evil in this world can wear you down. Yesterday the *Irmo News* reported that police are looking for a man wanted for burglary, grand larceny, and shoplifting. A thirteen year old student at Irmo Middle School has been charged with possessing a knife on school grounds. Police are looking for a fellow who cashed \$3000 in forged checks. And a Chapin man has been charged with promoting prostitution using children. It makes you not want to go out! Adam brought this world, so full of sin and wickedness, into existence. But Jesus will make a world where righteousness is a way of life.

Verse 20-21: *“And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* God gave his Law so that we might have a standard by which sin could be measured. That way no one could pretend he wasn’t a sinner. But Jesus subjected himself to the Law of God. He lived up to its requirements. And when he died he personally accepted the death penalty—not for his own crimes, but for ours. What a God he is!

In the garden of Eden, God met with Adam and Eve who had ruined everything for themselves and for us. He pronounced judgment upon them. And then in Genesis 3:15 he gave them a promise. He said, one day a savior will come and he’ll undo the damage. Well, Jesus has come. There are three applications. First, have you accepted his grace and his offer of forgiveness? All that’s required is that you repent and trust Christ to save you. When you receive Christ’s gift, live in such a way that you thank him for what he has given you. We’ll look at how to do that next week. Second, if you’ve received Christ’s gift, tell others of the hope we have in Jesus so they may join us. And third, as God has shown grace to you, treat others with grace. Build up the church in love. Honor God’s great restored masterpiece—the person Jesus has saved.

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