

ROMANS

THE CHRISTIAN'S CONSTITUTION

STUDY THIRTEEN

Guilt vs. Grace

Romans 5:12–21

What a magnificent relief it is for us to see ourselves no longer in Adam and under the domination of King Sin and Queen Death who ruled our lives long enough. We are now living under the authority of a new monarch whose name is Jesus the Lord, and He provides a way of life called grace—the freedom from the guilt of the old life is now ours to enjoy.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN we become citizens of another country, we take time to learn its language, explore its cuisine, appreciate its customs, and understand its government—especially if one of its founding principles and ideals is liberty. As we walk its streets, climb its mountains and hills, swim at its beaches, or sing its freedom songs, we forsake the old life and embrace the new.

Through our faith in Jesus Christ, God has granted us entrance to His kingdom. In Romans, Paul stands at the welcome center, ushering us into our new homeland and showing us all the blessings of liberty under grace.

This kingdom is not like the one we left, where sin and death reigned. As we'll learn in this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, in the old land, “sin ruled over all people and brought them to death” (Romans 5:21). But in Christ's new land, “God's wonderful grace rules instead” (5:21).

In Christ's land, we enjoy the most incredible benefits, which we studied in Romans 5:1–11. “Peace with God,” a secure standing in “grace,” “hope of . . . glory,” and “reconciliation” with God (5:1–2, 11 NASB). What a marvelous place to live!

How did God make it possible for us to escape our bleak, doomed existence under sin to become citizens of Christ's land, where joy abounds and grace reigns? Paul answers this question in Romans 5:12–21. He explains where we came from, how Christ rescued us, and the new land we enjoy. This passage recaps all Paul had written so far and forms a bridge to the rest of Romans, where we discover a new way of living as citizens of Christ's bountiful land.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

“I will walk in freedom, for I have devoted myself to your commandments” (Psalm 119:45). Ask God to give you the psalmist’s devotion as you carefully observe, patiently interpret, thoroughly correlate, and prayerfully apply the Scriptures.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

To explain how God rescued us from our existence under sin, Paul first had to explain how we came to be in that condition in the first place. Paul traces the roots of our sinful condition to Adam. Pastor Chuck lays the theological groundwork for understanding Adam’s role as progenitor of the human race.

Adam sinned by eating the forbidden fruit. Theologians tell us he acted as our federal head. And because he ate and sinned, we have the same pollution in our system. It’s impossible to bring a child into this world free of sin because there’s never been a parent free of sin. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Just as the action of a leader of a nation can affect all its citizens, Adam’s sin and guilt are legally credited to all of humanity. In addition, because Adam is our forefather, we have his spiritual DNA. *We are sinners by birth, by nature, and by choice.* Whether or not we feel guilty for our sin, we are under a sentence of guilt. Only God can remove our guilt with His divine pardon—and Paul explains how God does this in our passage.

What thoughts go through your mind as you consider your condition without Christ?

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Observation: Adam and Christ Contrasted

Take the first step of the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, observation.¹ As you read [Romans 5:12–21](#), picture yourself as a member of the Roman congregation hearing Paul’s words. Don’t hurry through. Let the words soak into your mind.

The Ruin of Humanity Through Adam—Romans 5:12–14

What key transitional word begins [Romans 5:1](#) and [5:12](#) in the NASB? What does this word signal in the logical flow of Paul’s thoughts?

The “therefore” in 5:12 indicates a pause for review. Paul summarized his teaching in Romans by contrasting Adam and Christ and their unique roles in human history.

According to [5:12–14](#), what came through Adam? What did sin bring? What did Paul highlight about the Law, sin, and death?

These verses sum up the main point of 1:18–3:20 that everyone has sinned. From the most wicked to the most religious, “we all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (Romans 3:23). Humanity needs rescue!

The Rescue of Humanity Through Christ—Romans 5:15–19

“Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come” (Romans 5:14). How? Although Adam was only one person and Christ is only one person, their lives still affect all humanity. They were alike in their broad impact, but that’s where the similarity ends. The ways that Adam and Christ impacted humanity could not be more different. Use the following chart to contrast the results of Adam’s *disobedience* to God versus the results of Christ’s *obedience* to God.

Guilt vs. Grace

Romans 5:12–21

Adam and Christ in Contrast <i>Romans 5:15–19</i>		
Verses	Results of Adam's Disobedience	Results of Christ's Obedience
<i>5:15</i>		
<i>5:16</i>		
<i>5:17</i>		
<i>5:18–19</i>		

The one act of each man, Adam and Christ, determined the destiny of many. By the one act of Adam, the destiny of those who never trust in Christ is death, condemnation, and judgment. But those who believe in Christ receive righteousness and the joy of living for Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Reign of Grace—Romans 5:20–21

After comparing Adam and Christ, Paul climaxed his argument with a triumphant declaration of the power of grace over sin. Observe [Romans 5:20–21](#) carefully. Why was God's Law given? As people sinned more, what happened to God's wonderful grace?

"When it's sin versus grace," Paul declared, "grace wins hands down" (Romans 5:20 MSG). Praise God for His grace!

For the first time in your life under grace you're able to do as Christ would have you do and live a life free of guilt. How good is that? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Guilt vs. Grace

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Interpretation: Guilt Versus Grace

In a nutshell, here's what Paul was teaching. In Adam, we live under guilt where sin and death reign. When Christ took our guilt upon Himself, He made available God's righteousness as a gift. When we receive His gift by faith, God ushers us into Christ's land where grace reigns.

Put into your own words your understanding of the following key concepts in Romans 5:12–21. How would you explain these concepts to a friend? Don't hesitate to consult your Bible-study resources or the online commentary [Constable's Notes](http://netbible.org) at netbible.org.

Sin entered the world: _____

Death spread to everyone: _____

Adam's sin led to condemnation: _____

Christ gives the gift of righteousness: _____

Believers receive justification: _____

Grace reigns instead of death: _____

Still carrying around in our bodies the nature of sin, however, the great benefit is that Christ declares us righteous in Himself when we believe in Him, and it breaks that grip of guilt and sin on us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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In [Romans 5:20–21](#), Paul stated that God’s wonderful grace superabounds where sin abounds. Look up the Greek word, [pleonazo](#), translated “superabound,” in the Greek lexicon at [billmounce.com](#). Get creative and write a paraphrase of this word to describe its meaning.

Where sin and death reigned as king and queen, grace came as the monarch to overthrow both. Grace has come abounding all the more. You will never get to the end of His grace. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: God’s Abounding Grace!

Correlation gives depth and balance to our faith—protecting us from extremes or doctrines that are based on one verse only, taken out of context.

God’s abounding grace appears in the early pages of Scripture. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were both naked and not ashamed ([Genesis 2:25](#)), but after their disobedience to God’s command ([2:16–17](#); [3:1–6](#)), they suddenly experienced shame and guilt ([3:7–8](#)).

[Genesis 3:15](#) foretells the coming of Christ who will crush the serpent’s head—heralding the life of freedom and victory over sin and death for all who come to Him. Compare [Romans 5:12–21](#); [1 Corinthians 15:21–22](#), [50–57](#); [Ephesians 2:1–10](#); and [1 Thessalonians 4:16–17](#). Summarize the benefits of being in Christ.

*It’s a comfort to know that when we breathe our last, we are at home with Him. And should we be alive when He returns, we will be taken up to be with Him, but not before those who have died in Christ. They’ll go first, and then we will follow. There will be the greatest reunion in the history of all time.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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Application: Choose Grace, not Guilt!

To apply the Scriptures, take time to respond to the moving of the Holy Spirit in your heart.¹ Lately, have you felt the drag of guilt, as if you still live under its reign? If so, what is this oppressive ruler saying to you?

What does your new ruler, grace, say to you?

Christ wants you to abide with Him in His land of grace. What would it be like to live in Christ's land all the time? Describe that lifestyle and ask the Lord to help you abound in His grace today.

How can you share grace with someone living in guilt? Write down this person's name and what you plan to say to him or her.

This might be the week for you to be the charming presence of the gospel. Just present it; let the Lord use it. It comes not by a push but by a pull. And what a great thing to have it said of you that you charmed them into righteousness!
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Paul is stretching out his hand and saying to you this moment, “Welcome to Christ’s land of grace!” Take his hand and step into the most wonderful place you’ll ever live!

The good news is when the grip of guilt is broken, we can now live above the drag and domination of sin’s impulse. That’s what the gift provides. It’s by grace. And what a wonderful way to live! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, my heart is filled with gratitude as a heavenly citizen. Thank You for sending my way someone who told me the truth. Help me to communicate with others the beauty, the joy, the love, the peace, and the forgiveness that are ours in Christ. Give me a winsome spirit and a willing heart to lead others to You. May Your grace reign in my life every day. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen!

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)”

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 2007, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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