

## The Structure of Romans 5:12-21

Romans 5:12: Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man [A]  
and death through sin [B],

chiasmus: sin [A] > death [B]; death [B] > sin [a]

and so death spread to all men [B],  
because all sinned [A] –

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1. Paul begins with the *protasis* (the condition of a conditional sentence) in verse 12, but the *apodosis* is broken off and not completed until v. 18b.

2. Paul suddenly digresses to explain the meaning of the verb "sinned" in verse 13, 14.

13 for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

3. Paul digresses again to explain the similarity/dissimilarity between Adam and Christ in vv. 15-17.

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.

4. Paul now returns to the *apodosis*, completing the *protasis* left open in v. 12:

18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

5. Verse 19 then follows as an explanation of v. 18.

19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

6. Verses 20, 21 explain the part played by the law in God's purpose.

20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

7. Murray<sup>1</sup> agrees with Cranfield, as does Morris, that this is the way in which Paul sets his arguments. In the heat of writing or dictating the letter, Paul introduces the main point in 5:12, "because all sinned," and then almost immediately he digresses, adding new two points - one regarding the meaning of "sinned" in v. 12, and then secondly, showing the great degree of contrast between the two figures - without finishing the point he began to make in verse 12. In order to correctly interpret the meaning of

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<sup>1</sup> Murray, The Imputation of Adam's Sin, 7-8. Murray calls verses 13-17 a "parenthesis."

the key and disputed phrase, "because all sinned" in verse 12, the explanation of Paul's original assertion is to be found in verses 18-19, where he completes his original thought.

8. The structure (and translation) for Romans 5:13-14 that Kline sets out can be illustrated as follows:

13a. "For sin was in the (whole world) until the law" (cf. the explanation in 14b) - Here the limit "until the law" is established (i.e. "before Moses"). Sin was in the world because Adam broke the covenant of works.

13b. "Now sin is not imputed where law is not in force" (cf. *Psalm 32:1-2c*; also *Romans 4:7-8*) - notice the emphasis on grace, i.e. the non-imputation of sin. Therefore the covenant line must be in view and this must be referring to those under the Covenant of Grace.

14a. "but death reigned from Adam" [who stands at the end of the covenant of works and at the beginning of the covenant of grace] "to Moses" [Paul is here giving a description of the patriarchal age, where death (because of guilt from Adam's sin) figures as a key factor in the biblical data. Moses then is the key figure in the coming of the Old Covenant (with the giving of the law), and he marks the end of the patriarchal age].

14b. "even over those who did not sin after the mode of the transgression of Adam" (cf. *Isaiah 24-26, especially 24:5*; *Hosea 6:7*; *Jer. 31:23*; and especially *Romans 4:15b*). This stands in marked contrast to the previous clause 14a, but in essence repeats what was said in 13b. The people in view here were not like Adam and under the covenant of works which had no provision for forgiveness, but instead under the covenant of grace, since sin was treated differently and there was a provision of forgiveness for them (cf. 13b).

14c. "Who was a type of the one to come" -- Paul returns to the thought he left off with in Romans 5:12, Adam is the federal head of the race and stands as the pattern of the Second Adam, Jesus Christ.

9. The context indicates that the parenthesis should be seen as follows:

The parenthesis in Rom 5:13-14 sits then in the middle of a chapter that as a whole surveys history from the covenant of creation [Kline's term for the Covenant of Works] to the new covenant in the fullness of time. As the parenthesis elaborates on the reign of sin / death mentioned in verse 12, it naturally continues this covenantal structuring. This is signaled, as we have noted, by the phrases "until the law" (v. 13a) and "from Adam to Moses" (v. 14a). By these allusions to the patriarchal / Abrahamic and law epochs the parenthesis fills in the history between the first and last covenants treated in the rest of Romans 5, so completing the cosmic mural of the four major covenant epochs.<sup>2</sup>

10. These are the Covenant of Works/Grace, the Abrahamic Covenant and the Covenant with Moses, as successive administrations of the Covenants.

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<sup>2</sup> Kline, "Gospel Until the Law," JETS 34 (1991), 437.