

## *Rival Reigns*

Romans Series by Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson

Text: Romans 5:12-21, Part 2

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### OPENING PRAYER:

Father in heaven as we turn again to your word, we pray that through the power of your Holy Spirit, it may be a living book to us. And that as we read the words inspired by your Spirit, we may also be conscious of his ongoing ministry, in the place and room of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Bringing your word to bear upon our lives in the times in which we live. And most of all, we pray, that in our worship and through your word, and at the table as we later share in the bread and the wine, we may be conscious of the near presence of our Savior, Jesus Christ. And like your disciples of old, feel our hearts burning within us as he spends time in our company, and we in his. So minister to us, we pray, by your Word and Spirit, for Jesus Christ, our redeemer's sake, Amen. Please be seated.

### SERMON:

Now, the title of our sermon this evening, *Rival Reigns*, could just as well have been the title of the Psalm that we've just sung. In our evening services, as most of you will know, we make our way through the Psalms. Sometimes we read them in different forms. Sometimes we sing them. We came this evening to the 83rd Psalm. And it reminds us of the promise that God gave in Genesis chapter three, verse 15, that throughout the ages the powers of darkness would seek to destroy the kingdom of God. What we need to remember, of course, as we read the Bible, is that the kingdom of God has emerged in different forms in the Old Testament days by and large it emerged in a national form. And that nation was often under military attack. That military attack had in its crosshairs the destruction of the kingdom of God. And so God's people, summoned God to defend them, as it were, in a military way. And to overcome their enemies. What is clear in the New Testament scriptures is that military weapons are no longer the artillery of God's Kingdom. The artillery of God's Kingdom is the armor of God that Paul describes in Ephesians chapter six, and verses 10 through 20. But the warfare is no less severe. The enemy is no less subtle. And so as we sing in times of stress and danger think about the way in which the Church of Jesus Christ was almost destroyed in China. Think of the way in which the Church of Jesus Christ was persecuted behind the Iron Curtain. The ways in which God's people called upon him to defend his honor. And the wonderful ways in which he has given the gospel victory in so many parts of the world. And we will see this Psalm in the context of our own time.

But we are to look at two different rival reigns tonight. To which the Apostle Paul speaks here in Romans chapter five, and verses 12 through 21. The reign of sin in death, and the reign of the obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ in righteousness. And I want to encourage you to have a Bible open before you this evening, as we're making our way through these verses in Romans chapter five. And as you would have had some sense from the reading tonight, same passage as we read last Lord's day evening, this is one of the most complex passages. Not simply in Paul's letter to the Romans, but actually anywhere to be found in the New Testament. But it does, as a matter of fact, have a basically simple message. And it's this that I want us to try to explore together this evening.

And let me simply explain why it's important that we do so. One of the buzz words of the last decade or so perhaps a little longer than that, the kind of word that sophisticated people use -- people who like to give off the aroma of their consciousness of what is going on in the intellectual world, one of the buzz expressions of recent years has been the expression "post modernism." Post Modernism. What is it that characterizes post modernism, you may ask? And you may also ask, what on earth could that have to do with Romans 5:12 through 21? Well, post modernism, as many of you know, is a way of looking at the world. It's a world and life view, that, for all practical purposes denies the notion that there are any absolutes. It does that morally. That's just your opinion. That's a lifestyle that pleases you. But you can't possibly make that lifestyle an absolute for other people. You find it in, in some very interesting ways for example, in literature, and then literary criticism. The texts -- pieces of literature, of course, don't have an absolute meaning. Their only real meaning is what the reader takes out of it. And so, in that whole spirit of, of deconstructing the old way of reading literature. Paradoxically, professors of English literature, will speak with coherence. Anticipating their students will take down careful notes. That they will regurgitate their powerful ratiocinations in the course of the exam, but the student is expected to write down that literature has got no fixed meaning.

One of the great things about getting old -- Well, there are several great things about getting old. But with respect to this, one of the great things about getting old is that you realize that post modernism actually is very old. The boys who were at school with me who weren't Christians said, don't you try to impose your way of life on us? If being a Christian suits you, that's fine. And we wish you well with it. But don't think for a moment that your beliefs are absolute truth. And you may have shared these conversations. Some of you who are even older than I am, shared them many years ago. When people have said to you -- people without very much education, who actually were pre-post-modernists but didn't know they were actually post modernists who just said to you, that's just your opinion. That's just your opinion. And intellectuals become furious when you say that kind of thing. Because they've spent their lives thinking up these theories. And the idea that an ordinary woman in an old street and Scotland who scarcely had anything more than an elementary education long before anyone spoke about being postmodern, said exactly the same things. Well, I don't see that in the passage. And, of course, one of the fundamental aspects of this and, and you can see it all over the place -- is -- and you see it not least in our political world, don't you? Where 100 years ago, a politician would say, this is right, and our policies will pursue it. A politician will say, we feel good about these things and that is why it is important to do it.

And you notice what disappears in the modern world is the big picture. What disappears, is the point of reference. And as I say one of the great things about growing old is, you feel we've seen all this before. And the other great thing about growing old is that you will learn just by experience, the principle of the fallacy of the self-denying axiom. For example, the great axiom of our day, there are no absolutes. And that is an absolute. And you see in so many ways, as philosophers have understood for years, so many

world and life views that present themselves as the new thing, founder on the very principle that they give out to be the latest discovery of the marvelous intellect of man. But the result of it all is, and this has been happening in our world for decades and even in a sense for a couple of centuries, the most devastating effect of it is that the young people you know, out in the world who aren't Christians, the older people, you know, who think seriously about life have got no frame of reference beyond themselves. History has got no meaning whatsoever. It's not going anywhere, and it didn't really come from anywhere. Lifestyle has no meaning beyond your personal meaning. And life has no meaning beyond your personal life. And so you are, as it were, awash in this world --with no anchor. You have no big picture into which your life fits. And so there is nothing that makes sense of your life. Because there is no such thing as a life that makes sense. Now why do I say Romans 5:12 to 21 is important, because Romans 5:12 to 21 gives you one of the most fundamental, big pictures the Bible has to offer, that makes sense of everything.

And we began to see this last Lord, stay evening in this amazing picture Paul is drawing in which he's, as it were, holding together the very beginning of history with our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring history to its great focus and consummation in the last day. And he's really saying to us, Paul is saying to us, dear, dear child of God, if you will just grasp what I want to say to you in these verses you'll be able to fit your life into the biggest picture of all, and the biggest picture of all, will make sense of everything. It will hold you up when life becomes dark and mysterious. It will fill you with joy because of the grace of God in the gospel. And in the context of Romans, he's doing this because, of course, what he's been emphasizing, earlier on, in a sense, has been individual, it's applied to everybody. But it's been individual. By nature we have sinned against God. We are under the judgment, and we're exposed to the wrath of God. But the glory of the gospel is, that our Lord Jesus Christ has born the judgment of God to bring us the forgiveness of sins. And as he's saying, at the beginning of chapter five, we are beginning to rejoice in the hope of glory. We are even able to rejoice in our sufferings, and we rejoice in God himself.

But now, it's as though he's saying, now, I just want to attach the wide angle lens to your individual Christian life. Because you need to see that the foundations of your Christian life go down much deeper than your own Christian life. And as he fixes on the wide angle lens, it takes in, as it were, the whole of history from the time of Adam to the time of Jesus Christ. And it's as though, you know as you watch this picture being opened out to you, that you're meant to think, Lord Jesus, I thought that when I came to you to trust you, I was coming to you for the forgiveness of my sins. And so I would have peace with God and I would go on living my life. I didn't realize that you are bringing me into this amazing world plan. I didn't realize that you were taking me out of the family of Adam, and putting me into the family of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I didn't understand the superlative riches of your grace that you pour out upon me in the gospel.

And I want us before we come to the Lord's table this evening to notice three things that the apostle underlines in these verses. And I think they will be helpful to us.

Number one is this. Remember, this is the big picture. The Apostle sees man sin written large into the big picture. What is the explanation for the way the world is tonight? What is the explanation for the deviance in human behavior? And what is the explanation for death? And he says it's all here in the word of God. Adam sinned and fell, and brought death and confusion, and condemnation. And death spread, you notice he says, "to all men", because, now notice exactly the words he uses at the end of verse 12, "deaths spread to all men, because all sinned". Now Paul had used that expression back in

Romans chapter three, verse 23, you remember it. "All have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God." And He is speaking there about the way you have sinned, and I have sinned and the tragedy of my life is that I am devoid of the glory of God. But He means something bigger here.

He is not talking here, in the first instance, about your personal sin. He is talking about Adam's sin, and how you have become implicated in Adam's sin. Remember, we noted last time that in these verses, the apostle Paul sees the Lord Jesus and Adam, not just as individuals, but as representative men. So that whatever each of them does, can be accounted for others. So he is saying to us here, that death spread to all, not just because each of us has sinned, although that's true, but death spread to all, because all sinned in Adam. And this, he says, is the reason why death reigned from Adam to Moses, verse 14, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam. You know, some very landed commentators and good commentators on Romans, at this point, have wondered whether the Apostle Paul had in the back of his mind the death of infants. Why do infants die? When they haven't broken a commandment, the way Adam broke the commandment? Well, here is the answer. Because we are all implicated in the sin and rebellion of our father. When he sinned, he brought the entire human family into total spiritual bankruptcy. And all that has been inherited by us is a world that is alienated from God, and a world that is ripe for judgment.

Now, it's interesting to notice how he seems to work this out. You notice he speaks about it in verse 15, when he speaks about the "one man's trespass". And in verse 16, when he speaks about "one man's sin." And then at the end of verse 16, he says, "the judgment", that's the condemnation, "the judgment following one trespass". And then you notice, he goes on about this in an even more interesting way. Verse 17, he speaks about one man's trespass. But then in verse 18, you notice these words, the one man's one trespass. Therefore, as one trespass, lead to condemnation for all men. Now the only way that's possible is if Adam's sin, his one trespass against God's clear commandment, if that one sin, as it were, were accounted to everybody in Adam's family.

And you see how he's painting sin here into the big picture. And it's a very frightening picture again in verse 19. He speaks about the one man's disobedience, constituting the many as sinners. Of course, some people say, well, there's something, there's something strange about that kind of arrangement. There's nothing strange about that kind of arrangement at all. You ask a man whose father is a multimillionaire, you say to him, now, it's a very unfair arrangement that you inherit those multi-millions. That's very unfair, isn't it? How many of you who have ever inherited riches have regarded it as so unfair, you've given them away? You would regard that as perfectly just? Why? Because you're in the family. And that's how God constituted the human race from the very beginning. So don't turn round to God and say, why did you make this arrangement? When in fact, this arrangement, by its very nature was, as it were mapped out to lead to Adam living in obedience to God and bringing great and untold blessing upon the world.

But alas, and alack, Paul says, the truth of the matter, you can read it about it in Genesis three, can't you there? The truth of the matter is that Adam, our father, sinned and rebelled against God. And in his sinfulness he brought ruin upon the whole human race. It is a cosmic tragedy! Our father squandered our spiritual fortune. He bankrupted spiritually, the entire human race. That's why David says he was conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity, not because he thought there was anything wrong about having babies, but because he understood that from the very beginning of his life, he was involved and engaged in the sin that had brought such ruin upon the world. And he was spiritually depraved as a consequence. And yet, the marvelous thing in the midst of all this is there's just a little phrase that gives

us hope. "Adam", says Paul, do you notice his language in verse 14, "was a type" or a pattern "of the one who was to come". You see, while he needs to paint this dark picture, he's actually not so interested in the dark picture, as to use the dark picture, to help us to understand how bright and glorious the great picture of the gospel is. Adam, was in some respects a pattern. He was a kind of model of the One who was to come. And the one who was to come, of course, was our Lord Jesus Christ.

So having shown us that man sinners written large into the big picture, now Paul wants to show us, and this is the real point of the passage, how God's grace is written large into the big picture. You see because God constituted the human race, under a representative, it gives him the privilege and the right to reconstitute men and women under a new representative. And so he sends his son, the proper man whom God Himself has bidden, as Martin Luther teaches us to say, the second man, the last Adam.

And he is like the first Adam, in this respect, that he comes not just to live for himself, the Lord Jesus Christ had no need to live for himself. Certainly no need to die for himself. He sends His Son to be a new representative head of a new people, a new humanity, a saved humanity that he is going to create. And in that sense, there is a parallel between Adam and the Lord Jesus Christ. But the thing is, you see, if this new Adam, if this new man is going to save a new humanity, he needs to act in a totally opposite way from the way in which the first man and the first Adam acted. Not only that, but he's got to do something as it were to pay for, to repair, to make amends for what the first Adam has done. And so although the one sin of the one man brought the whole human race down in condemnation and death, it takes the whole 33 year life of perfect obedience on the part of the second man and the last Adam. And then at the end of that perfect life, that he should offer his perfect person up in our humanity before his father's judgment, and say, as it were, now Father, as I stand before you as the representative of those who have been in Adam, who have shared in that sin and tasted that disaster, let that disaster fall on me. And on the cross of Christ, Jesus, as it were, takes the place of those who are condemned in Adam's sin and their own. Having lived a life of complete perfection, in order that he might do for us what we could never do for ourselves. And that's why the Apostle Paul is so anxious to say, there's a parallel between Adam and Jesus. But there is a complete antithesis also, between Jesus and Adam. Whereas Adam sinned and fell and whereas his one sin brought condemnation, Jesus was obedient throughout the whole course of his life. And as you remember, he says in Philippians chapter two, "he became obedient, even unto death. Even unto the death of the cross". So that everything that we needed, -- an obedience where Adam had been disobedient, a sacrifice to pay the penalty for the sins of Adam, and for us might be made for us. So that the apostle Paul is able to say wonderfully, there's not only an antithesis a contradiction between what Adam did and what Jesus does. But there is a total difference between the result of what Adam did: condemnation and death; and the result of what our Lord Jesus Christ did the gift of righteousness and life.

And you see what he's saying. He's saying, do you see the big picture? Do you see how tragic the real situation is in the world tonight? It's not just a matter of people doing bad things, and they can repair that. It's that the whole human race has fallen in its father Adam, and is spiritually bankrupt and alienated from God. And doesn't have the capacity to find a way back. And so God has begun again, sending his own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin, as Paul will later say, and for sin condemning sin in the flesh in order that forgiveness and restoration might be ours.

Have you ever grasped Jesus' double obedience? And do you see why it's so necessary for you? If all Jesus had done in coming into the world was to die for your sins, all he would have given you in salvation, would be the opportunity to go back to the Garden of Eden and try again. But he's done far more than that. He has not only died for the guilt of our sins, He has lived a life of perfect obedience in our place. So that when we sing about being "clothed with his righteousness divine", you understand that that righteousness is not only a perfect righteousness, it's a final, irreversible, righteousness. So that even in this world when you continue to struggle as a Christian who is also a sinner, as Martin Luther used to say, a justified man who is also a sinner. As that reality is part of your life, as Paul will go on to speak about it. What are you going to say when Satan comes to you and says to you, yes, I know Jesus died on the cross. But look at you. You'll never get to heaven, struggling like this. You've still got sin in you. You still fail, you still stumble! And you say to him, yes, but Jesus Christ has not only died on the cross, to pardon my past sin, Jesus Christ has lived a life of perfect obedience. And it is this too that he gives to me, in order that I may be counted righteous, irreversibly righteous in the sight of God. That's why Paul is so thrilled with this gospel. That's why he finds this gospel so liberating. That's why he's so sure that nothing can ever separate him from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Because it's not a half righteousness that he's been given. It's a righteousness that will take him all the way home. And it's a righteousness, that we'll be able to withstand the searing holiness of God that sees through all false righteousness. Because it's the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, that brings us to our third thing I want you to notice. Paul, yes, sees man's sin written large in the big picture, and he sees God's grace written large in the big picture. But what he wants most of all, that we should see is our privileges as Christians written large into the big picture. He's really wanting, he's wanting us to bathe in the privileges. And you see that's why he's had to go so far down into the foundations. If you don't go down into the foundations, you don't build a big enough, strong enough, structure of the gospel to be able to see the sheer magnificence of the privileges that are yours.

And he sums this up in a very interesting expression he uses more than once. Look at it in verse 15. "If many died through one man's trespass, much more of the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many." And again in verse 17, "If because of one man's trespass, death, rain 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." And again in verse 20, "The law came in to increase the trespass. But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." Can you see it here? He's got Adam on the one side, and his horrific sin and the tragic consequences and Jesus on the other side. And his life of perfect obedience and His sacrifice on the cross and the blessings that flow from him. And do you see he is saying, these are opposite, but they are never equal. The grace of Jesus Christ is not merely equal to sin. There is far more grace in Jesus Christ than there is sin in us. Sometimes our hymn writers catch that don't they? "Grace, grace, God's grace, grace, that is" equal to all my sin? No "grace that is greater than all my sin." Or my own favorite, is this (Tirsteigan?) Or, "Oh, Jesus, full of pardoning grace, more full of grace, than I of sin." Or Isaac Watts, "In Him, the tribes of Adam boast more blessings than their father lost." And you see at the very, at the very heart of what he's saying, with this big picture. And yes, with some of these complicated statements that may be difficult for us to understand and take in, in just a brief evening, the thing he most wants us to see is that Jesus towers above Adam. That Jesus pardon towers above our sin. That Jesus' grace towers above our failures. And so we're able to go to him, because he's not just taking us back to Eden. He's bringing us forwards to righteousness -- to everlasting life.

You see, my dear friends, as I say, this may not be the most straightforward passage for us to grasp. It's worth studying in detail. These concepts may be concepts that we're not too familiar with in the contemporary Christian world. But grasp these concepts and it puts your life in a totally different perspective altogether. And you at last know where you are in history. But perhaps even more important than that, some of you are the kind of people who, whenever you stumble and fall are oppressed by your failure. And some of you are very sensitive people. And you are easily oppressed by Satan. And you are, as the hymn writer says, "bowed down beneath a load of Sin by Satan sorely pressed." Some of you are just like that, aren't you? I think that's John Newton, isn't it? How did John Newton know this? Because he'd been a slave trader, and he was plagued by the memory of his sins. And he had a friend called William Cooper who was plagued by melancholy. And he needed to know this. Jesus' grace is far greater than your sin. But it is impossible for your sin, confessed to Jesus, to be greater than his grace. He has oceans of grace. He is not a headmaster, or a police officer. He is not a moral policeman giving you points on your spiritual license. He did not come to judge the world. Condemn the world, but to save. And there is more grace in the Lord Jesus than there is sin in your heart. And so we need to come and sink ourselves in that grace, and say, "Be thou my shield and hiding place that sheltered near thy side. I may my fierce accuser face." Now when you face your fears, accuser, what are you going to say to him? Are you going to say I'm not that bad? No, you're going to say to him, I am far worse than you accuse me of, but Satan, I tell you this, there is more grace in Jesus Christ than there is sin in me.

And you see, that's what, that's what keeps you swimming. That's what keeps you going. You know, there are some Christian believers, there may be some of us who fit into this category, that we're it not for the fact that we meet in the Lord's house week by week, we could hardly keep going. It's the thing that stabilizes us. The fact that God is still speaking to us, in His Word. It just holds us going. We struggle. Sometimes we feel we are drowning. Jesus is saying to us, there is more grace in me than there is failure in you. Some of us feel we can never start again. Some of us feel that we have absolutely abandoned all possibility of joy in the Lord Jesus Christ because of our sins. And he is saying you cannot out sin my grace, because there is more grace in me. But Lord, says Paul, Lord, "sin is abounding". Interesting that John Bunyan took that verse up and made it the title of his autobiography. Do you know what it's called? Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners. Paul knew that, because he was a murderer. You don't get much lower than trying to destroy faithful Christians and trying to destroy more. But there was more grace in the Lord Jesus than there was sin in Saul of Tarsus. And the same is true for you.

And dear ones, the reason we can come to this table is this. That despite the fact that early one morning in the Garden of Eden, the serpent whispered to our first parents take and eat. Only because there is more grace in the Lord Jesus than there is sin in me. Can I hear these blessed words this evening: take and eat. The Gospel is that big, because Christ has that grace. So let us come.

#### CLOSING PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray, that even as we are overwhelmed by our own sense of sin and failure and need. And some crushed by past guilt, and shame. And some oppressed by the sinister, mysterious work of Satan, seeking to make us feel that the Lord Jesus no longer loves us. Oh we pray this evening, as we come to the table, that we may drink freely and fully of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this we ask in his name. Amen.