

Romans 5:12-21 Kingdom Top Trumps

This is a difficult passage – not because of the meaning but because it is written in a difficult way. Paul, the writer, allowing his rhetoric to run away with his logic!

So if you find it difficult – it is.

A few key concepts before you read it:

- Paul talks about the one “man” – and he means either Adam as a representative of Adam and Eve and of all mankind or Jesus as the Saviour of all mankind. Whatever you believe about creation - “one man” and Adam is used not because of a gender thing but as a blueprint or prototype for us. Adam prefigures mankind. Men and women.
- “Law” refers to an understanding that we have stepped across a line in our disobedience of God – initially when Adam and Eve took a bite out of the apple. Subsequently, when Moses gave the 10 commandments, he put in place a “law” which meant that we know when we sin. For example, beforehand we had not been told that coveting was wrong. Now we know.
- A reminder about Adam and Eve – the account which provides the backdrop to this passage (from Genesis chapters 2&3). God has created mankind, Adam and Eve. He has given them free reign over animals and plants and the glorious garden of Eden. There is one prohibition – don’t eat the fruit of that one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But Satan tempts them and they pluck the apple off that tree and take a bite. The first act of disobedience and so sin entered the world.

Romans 5:12-21

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 –

13 To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone’s account where there is no law. 14 Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to 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.

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! 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. 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 of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

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. 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.

20 The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, 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.

Choosing your DNA

Do you ever wish that you got to choose a slightly improved set of parents? Especially when you realised what you've inherited from them!

Have you ever had that experience of spotting something in your parents that really irritated you and then realising that you were doing exactly the same? Phrases uttered by Dad's and then by their children when they become parents:

- Turn that music down!
- Call that music? Can't tell a word they're singing!
- Etc

I was always shocked by my father's dismissal of famous people, of celebrities. "But Eric Clapton says ... such and such". "Eric Clapton plays a Fender Stratocaster". "Billy Bremner does this" (famous Leeds United player). And my Dad would say, so what?

He would simply mock the people that seemed to be important in our culture. I never got it until I found myself doing exactly the same thing with my boys. "What, you listen to what Kim Kardashian says?"

Actually they don't listen to her - but lots of people do!

Unless you've been adopted you will not only carry something of your parents' DNA you will find it popping out in the person you become.

Whether we like it or not, we have inherited a sinful DNA from Adam & Eve. It's part of who we are. By nature we're fallen. We might look at them, in fact we might look back at humanity, especially after this weekend, and deeply wish to deny it but we all carry the same DNA.

Everyone one of us has the DNA of sinfulness. I'm not saying we're all likely to become mass murderers – of course not. But none of us is sinless, not one. It's not just an act of rebellion – us choosing to sin. Most of us try not to! Being sinful is a part of our human condition.

But the glorious truth of the good news about Jesus is that **we can be genetically modified**. This condition can be changed. We may have been sinners but we can be forgiven and set free. When you choose to follow Christ the bible talks about it being a new birth. That's why we use the phrase born-again Christian.

I was originally born into sin but when I decided to follow Jesus and gave my life to him I was born again, of a new father, with a new DNA and a new genetic code. And many of you can testify to the same story.

It says that "death reigned" (verse 14). What does it look like when the enemy reigns? When sin completely takes over? Although we can cite examples "over there" – observing terrorist attacks for example - it is something that applies to us all right here unless we allow the power of God to set us free and rescue us from the law of sin and death.

Do you remember that scene from the Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers when Gandalf comes and sets King Theodin free from the grip of Saruman and the devious counsels of Wormtongue. Tolkein's story is an illustration of how good sets us free from evil.

Lord of the Rings video clip

The reason I have called this talk "Kingdom Top Trumps" is because in Romans 5 we see this battle between evil and good, between Saruman and Gandalf, between Adam and Jesus.

It is like playing Top Trumps – a card game where players compare the score on a variety of features of the subject of the game. Football players, cars, baby animals (how many months in mummy's tummy etc!).

Adam plays a card and each time it is trumped by a more powerful card. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace, grace, grace.

- Adam plays "death by sin" – and Jesus replies with the "gift of grace" (v15).
- Adam tries "condemnation", using the terminology of the law court, "you are guilty" – and Jesus declares "justification", "you are not guilty" (v16).
- So Adam calls on "death" – but Jesus rises from the grave and proclaims "life" (v17).
- Adam tries more "sin and disobedience", doing our own thing – but Jesus gives us "righteousness", a new way of living (v19).

- Adam keeps trying “more sin” – and Jesus keeps trumping him with “more grace” (v20).

What do we see when we look around? A world in which sin & disobedience spoil everything. A world in which we live under condemnation – of each other and of ourselves, walking under a cloud of guilt and a sense of shame. A world in which we grapple with death and loss at every turn.

It begins to feel as though the enemy has won sometimes - but then along comes Jesus with the good, good, news of grace and trumps him every time.

Adam is beaten on every count. The enemy's strategy is destroyed. Nil points.

It's a compelling proposition isn't it?

Death, condemnation, sin - or - grace, justification, life, righteousness.

What would you rather have?

How do we get hold of this?

How do we change our pack of cards so we can trump every one played by the enemy?

There are some key things to note about this pack of cards in which grace trumps everything played against you:

1. Whereas Adam's legacy is automatically inherited, the gift of Jesus Christ has to be received. You can choose to reject grace – or you can accept it.
2. This is an exclusive pack of cards. Only in Christ is there grace to deal with sin and death. There is no other name under the sun by which you can be saved.
3. But this is an inclusive gospel. It is available for all. Every one of you and your friends.

Conclusion

By nature we were fallen. We inherited Adam's DNA of disobedience to God. But in Jesus we are offered the free gift of grace which trumps everything the enemy would throw at us.

Whilst we were fallen, once we choose to receive Jesus, to believe in His name, we are justified by grace, we are given a new genetic code and we are no longer sinners.

Invitation

Have you allowed the enemy to play you some duff cards?

Are you living under condemnation, guilt, shame, the devastation of death. Are you unable to shake that sinfulness, disobedience?

Would you like to receive grace – for the first time perhaps or for the nth time? Do you want to receive this, to say yes?

Then simply stop, turn to Jesus and say “I’m sorry, please forgive me and grant me your new life.” As you pray this prayer Jesus sends His Holy Spirit to fill you, transform you and, as you are “born again” you will be genetically re-engineered in the supernatural sense to live freely as you follow Jesus.

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Much of this material is inspired by:

Simon Ponsonby's God is For us, chapter 21.