

Sermon Outline

HEADS OF STATES: A STUDY OF ROMANS 5:12-21

THE REIGN OF GRACE (ROMANS 5:20-21)

I. Introduction

II. The Law Increases the Trespass (?!) (Rom 5:20)

- A. Verse 20: “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” Two key insights stand out in this verse.
- B. First insight: Verse 20 tells us about *God’s intentions in giving the Law*. God gave the Law “to increase the trespass.”
- C. This might sound strange since we often think of the Law as being given precisely to prevent sin from happening.
- D. What does Paul mean when he says that the Law “came in to increase the trespass”
1. Reading Paul alongside the rest of Scripture, we should not think that Paul means to say that the Law *cannot* inspire some externally helpful behaviors in human beings.
 2. Unbelievers can do parts of what the Law requires.
 - Romans 2:14-15: “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.”
 3. One does not need to be a Jew or a Christian to know that murder, theft, and adultery are wrong.
- E. But when Paul says the Law “came in to increase the trespass,” he is getting at the primary effect the Law has on sinful people.
1. It is one thing to say that the Law was given to prohibit bad deeds and inspire good deeds.
 2. It is another thing to say that the Law can succeed in doing this in sinful people.

3. Instead of generating the holy perfection that it requires, the Law has the opposite effect. It increases the trespass.
- F. How does the Law “increase the trespass”? There are at least two related options. The Law increases the trespass in that...
1. It increases our awareness of our wrongdoing.
 - Romans 3:20: “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”
 2. It has the effect of stirring up our dormant sinful tendencies (thus revealing to us just how sinful we truly are!).
 - Romans 7:5: “For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.”
 - Romans 7:7-10: “What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ ⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. ⁹ I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. ¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.”

III. But Grace Super-Increases! (Rom 5:20)

- A. God published the Law at Sinai knowing full well the “allergic reaction” sinners would have toward it.
- B. Why then did God do it? Second insight from v 20: “...but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (v 20).
—God allowed the trespass to increase so that he can show sinners/trespassers just how much he loves them and how far he is willing to go to reclaim them.
- C. The word for “abound” (Gk: *hypereperisensen*) translates to “over-increase,” “increase exceedingly,” or “superabound.”
 1. The picture is not one of moderation or balance, but overwhelming generosity, overflowing mercy, overpowering goodness.
 2. If sin is that great, God’s grace is greater still!
—God is more determined to heal and restore than sin is determined to hurt and kill. And God has infinite determination.
- D. We are now able to see more clearly why God has allowed evil in the world.

1. A partial answer: People are responsible for the decisions they make. God does not encourage people to sin!
 2. But from Romans 5:12-21, God allows sin to increase in order to give God an opportunity to be our Savior, to show us his infinite goodness.
- E. In the final estimation, the Law was never intended to make us perfect before God. It was given to show us our sins and lead us to the only One who can perfect us, the Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. That Grace Might Reign (Rom 5:21)

- A. Having explained that God gave the Law so that sin would increase and that his grace would increase even more (v 20), Paul shows us in v 21 why God gives his super-abundant grace.
—It is “so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
- B. “Sin reigned in death” is the reality of existence in Adam.
1. When we were dead in Adam, sin was the dominant reality. All we could do was sin, because we had no hope.
 2. We must look on the world with pity, not merely disgust.
 3. In the state of death, which is a result of being (a) in Adam and (b) under the Law, sin cannot but rule.
 4. If we are under the Law, we are under death, and therefore, under sin.
 5. We cannot expect people without hope to have an interest in the holy things of God.
- C. Because he loves us so much, God invades this hopeless situation and replaces the rule of death with the rule of grace.
- D. God wants his grace (= mercy, forgiveness, undeserved favor, etc.) to be the new ruling power over his children: “...as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign...”
- E. God sends his grace to break the rule of condemnation, death, and sin over our lives.
- F. Other aspects of the reign of grace:
1. Grace reigns “through righteousness” (i.e., the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ).
 2. Grace reigns unto “eternal life...”
 3. Grace reigns “through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

V. Life under Grace

God rules his children by his grace. Since God designed for his grace to free us from death and bring us to eternal life, God's grace also frees us from the fear of death and all the little ways it manifests in our lives and causes suffering in us and others.

Questions for Reflection

1. Was there anything in particular about today's sermon that blessed and encouraged you?
2. Was there anything that you disagree with or found difficult to accept?
3. According to Rom 5:20, why did God give the Law?
4. What does Paul mean when he says that the Law "came in to increase the trespass"?
5. How does the Law end up arousing sin (see Rom 7:5, 7-10)? Is the Law itself sinful?
6. If God knew about our "allergic reaction" to his Law from the very beginning, based on v 20, why did he give the Law? What larger purpose did the Law serve?
7. What does the word "abound" tell us about the nature of God's grace?
8. Pray that God would grow in you the knowledge of his grace. Pray that this knowledge would be experienced daily, increasingly in you and others.