

## God's Grace >> Our Sin Romans 5:18-21

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For us to get Romans 5 today we have to review some mathematical symbols you likely haven't seen in a long time:

+  
=

I just thought we'd get good momentum going. Here are the relevant ones for today:

> 10 > 5  
≥ 10 ≥ 9.9999  
>> 10 >> 1

Our text today deals with gospel math, specifically the math of sin and grace. Our sin. God's grace. Which is greater?

*"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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."* (Romans 5:18-19 ESV)

Verses 18 and 19 repeat the core truth of verses 15-17. When Adam sinned, we all sinned with him. One man's sin brought inherited guilt to the entire human race. We talked about that last week. Remember, before we think it's a terrible thing that one person can represent all of us, it was this principle that God used in making Jesus our representative. When Adam died, we died with him. When Jesus died, he died representing all of us. He died in our place. One for all and all for one.

### Two Lurking Heresies

Heresy is a strong word, but it means any departure from orthodox Christian truth, particularly if it changes the gospel. Lurking in these verses are two heresies that are alive and well in the modern church. The first is that Adam was not a historical figure. The historicity of Adam is a debate in which people who lean on scientific investigation say that supposing a created Adam as the first man goes against what origin studies are suggesting. They interpret Adam as a mythical character or a summary word for all humans.

To this we say, Paul believed in an actual and real Adam who was a progenitor of the whole human race. Paul's whole thesis in chapter 5 rests on Adam as a type of Jesus. One man's sin condemning all of us. Make Adam a myth and can't you do the same with Christ? And thus, Romans 5 collapses, as well as the gospel.

We see the second heresy if we take verse 18 in isolation. *"So, one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men."* (Romans 5:18) If you just pulled that verse out you could say, look, *"it says justification and life for all men!"* Apparently, everybody is saved eventually. That's what universalism teaches. This doctrine has always been popular for obvious reasons. Who wouldn't want the assurance that everybody is saved in the end?

If you drive by a Unitarian Church and wonder, what do they believe? This is what they believe. But there are also many than them as there are universalists lurking in most

denominations. Universalism can hold that all religious roads lead to God or that in hell people can repent and be saved—even Satan. Most recently the very popular book *The Shack* heads this direction. Well-known author and media preacher Rob Bell put universalism forward with his book *Love Wins* a few years ago. Now he tours with Oprah and has left his orthodox theological roots.

So, don't think this isn't out there because it is. Rebuffing universalism is not the point of this sermon, but I want to warn you that errant theology is what you get when you take verses out of context. Clearly the Apostle Paul doesn't think everyone is saved in the end.

The whole letter of Romans is an explanation of the gospel with urgings from the apostle to have beautiful feet and bring the good news of Jesus to all the world. Verse 18 is saying that all people who are tethered to Jesus by faith are saved from God's wrath. So, be discerning and please hold to an historical Adam and a gospel of salvation that comes only by faith in Jesus.

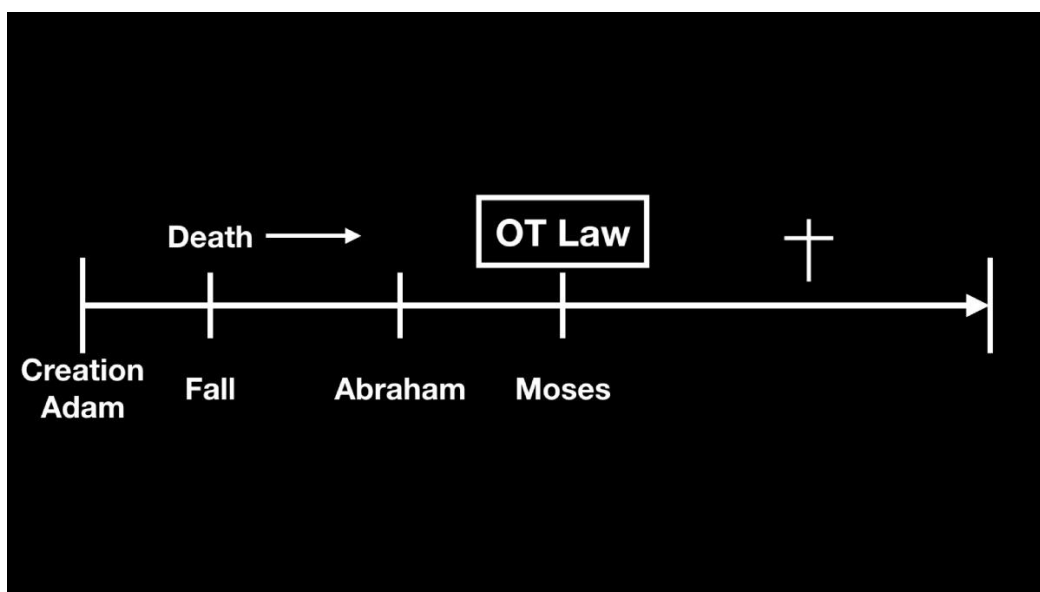
I want us to focus on verses 20-21.

*"Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 5:20-21, ESV)

You may say, why all this talk about the Law of God? The Old Testament Law. Remember who Paul is writing to. A Jewish/Gentile congregation in Rome. The Law to the Gentile Christians was new and maybe unfamiliar. The Law to the Jewish believers had been the basis for their relationship with God.

The gospel comes along and says to the Gentiles, the Law is more important than you realize and to the Jews it's less important than you think. So, what is the purpose of the Law of God?

See the beginning of verse 20, *"the law came in to increase the trespass."* What? How can a law increase the wrongness of a moral action? Let's remember the Law's place in the story.



The Law didn't come until Moses. In the previous verses he has said that just because the Law hadn't been given doesn't mean people weren't guilty. How else do you explain everyone dying? All died. All were guilty.

So why does God give the Law? This requires a much larger answer. But Paul is focusing on one primary reason God gave the Law, *"to increase the trespass."* If everyone was already dying before the Law, isn't it kind of piling on by God to bring the Law? Yet that is what the Law does. It doesn't make sin worse; rather it shows us just how bad we actually are. It is a mirror.

I got married a few years ago and while I had sisters, I was unprepared for many of the female tools used for beautification. Especially early on I was like, what is that? What does that do? It was a huge learning curve, and single men, should you get married I would recommend reading a tutorial on all these things.

One of those devices that females use are mirrors. Now did you know that there are female mirrors that make things smaller and mirrors that make things bigger? Ask a woman to explain as I do not dare to venture into this far. However, it is very helpful to understand how the mirror that makes things bigger works. It's concave in shape. Sometimes with its own lighting. It is used by women to see their face up-close. It magnifies their face but that's not the point. The point is not to magnify the face, but to magnify the blemishes. Everyone is ugly in the magnifying mirror because when you look into it you see every little skin spot, zit, scar, and pore of your face. Those things were always there, but you'd never know it.

How could this be helpful? Wouldn't it be better to remain ignorant of your blemishes, like we men do? Men don't use magnifying mirrors. We don't need a mirror to know we look good. So why do millions of homes and hotel rooms feature such mirrors? Well, do magnifying mirrors change how you look? No. All they do is allow you to see clearly all the blemishes. They place direct light on the imperfections. They bring into focus our deficiencies.

*"The law came in to increase the trespass."* (Romans 5:20)

How? The moral and spiritual commands of the Law only show more clearly all our transgressions. We are more sinful than we realize, but how do we realize it? Our conscience is helpful. The beauty of creation speaks of a Creator and indicts us. But the clearest way to know just how sinful we are, is to peer into the Law of God and realize what God requires.

Just consider the 10 commandments. *You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make an image of God. You shall not take the Lord's name in vain. You shall keep the Sabbath holy. You shall honor your Father and mother. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not lie. You shall not selfishly desire anything owned by your neighbor.* (Exodus 20:3-17)

I simply read that and how do we feel? We get squirmy. We begin to think of this past week and we feel even more guilty than we did. Why? The Law doesn't make sin sin. Sin is sin because of God, not the Law. But the Law reveals in magnified clarity the depth and breadth of our sinfulness. It shows every pore of our idolatry. Every covetous mole. Every prideful sun spot. The Law came to increase the trespass by making it clear to all humanity, we all fall short of the glory of God. Far, far short.

*"But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."* (Romans 5:20)

While we may be more sinful than we realize, we are not more sinful than God realizes. He sees us in all our imperfections. Even when the Law condemns us with clarity and heightened guilt, God's grace abounded all the more.

What is grace? Grace is favor that is given without earning it. Unmerited kindness. Giving what isn't deserved to people who deserve the opposite. That's grace. Grace in the New Testament becomes almost shorthand for the gospel because what is the gospel if not God giving us what we don't deserve? But we could ask, is God's grace without limitation? Can it handle sin, even sin that is highlighted in the magnifying mirror of God's Law? Sin in all its ugliness. Sin in its powerful influence. Sin in its essential hatred of God. Sin in its total control over a person's life. What happens to grace then?

There is a precious truth in the original Greek language. "Abounded all the more" translates as one Greek word. It is the word *abounded* with a prefix: *hyper*. This is where we get the words "hyperdrive" or "hypersonic" from.

We sometimes say to our girls, "Why are you so hyper?" What does that mean? Overflowing energy. It is translated as "*super*." But where sin abounded, grace super-abounded. Hyper-abounded. Lavishly abounded.

Here's the math. You may think it's this:

**God's grace > our sin**

It is actually this...

**God's grace >> our sin**

God's grace far exceeds our guilt. God's desire and ability to save is far greater than our ability to sin. We are really good at sinning. Yet God is even better at giving grace for sin. When the Law heightens our guilt before God, God's grace super-abounds over all our sin. Even the worst of sin, God's grace stretches to meet.

Think with me how important this is. Let's say this was the formula of God's grace.

**Our sin > God's grace**

The grace of God could be real, but simply not enough to overcome our sin. The end result is that God might want to save us by grace, but he simply wouldn't have enough to do so. He would be gracious, but we would still end up in hell.

**God's grace = our sin**

This would mean God's grace is finite. It could equal our sin but never overwhelm it. He would be like the benevolent Father who just keeps paying the debts for his rebellious son. Only paying what he had to pay.

**God's grace > our sin**

Paul could have said this. *Where sin increased, God's grace increased*. God's grace only goes as high as it needs to, as high as it has to go. This would insinuate God is frugal with

his grace or measured in his giving of grace. He gives what he has to give, no more. Just enough to be greater than the sin.

But that's not what Paul said either. What Paul wrote was, *where sin increased God's grace super-increased*. Super abounded.

### **God's Grace >> Our Sin**

His grace isn't simply greater than our sin, it is far greater than all our sin and guilt. He neither lacks grace nor the desire to apply it to us. He is not frugal with his grace, he is lavish with his grace. Why?

*"So that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 5:21)

How complete a victory does something have to be to be considered a "reign?" Reign means domination. So how complete has sin's "reign" been since Adam? I would call it a domination. Sin is a dynasty. Every single human being who has ever lived has lived under its reign and has died.

To put this in perspective, Rome is considered the greatest kingdom ever because it lasted so long. How long? Rome was essentially the dominant world power for 500 years. The reign of Rome. We use this term in sports, a team is a dynasty if they win for a long time. So, UCLA under John Wooden was a dynasty. The Munster high school swim team has won the district swimming championship for over 30 years straight. The reign of Munster swimming. To reign you have to so clearly dominate your opponent that it's not even close. You win once by one point, that's not a reign. That's not a dynasty. You win by a lot, all the time for a long time, that's a dynasty.

What we see in the plan of God through the gospel is that God is not content to barely win over sin. To just barely win over Satan. He is not looking for a one-point win. No. He is not glorified by simply defeating sin. God is glorified by dominating sin. By destroying sin. By displaying his grace with such overflowing and clear domination that forever he will be praised for the dynasty of his grace. Or as verse 21 says, *"grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

What this means for us personally is this, as the Law does its condemning work and we continue to struggle against the presence and power of sin in our lives, what we should never wonder is whether God's grace can and will cover our sin. *Pastor Steve, you mean our ordinary sins. Our everyday sins. Our attitudinal sins. Our selfish words and actions type sins. Failing to walk the old lady across the road. God's grace is enough that it exceeds the guilt of our normal sins. Right?*

True. But Paul could have said, where sin abounds God's grace abounds. But that's not what he said. He said, *where sin increases, God's grace super-increases*. God's grace rises above the worst of our sins. Our worst moments, the embarrassing failures, immoral moments, the class A felony sins that men and women commit, even those sins God's grace can and will super-abound over them. So much that it's not even close. God's grace is a dynasty grace.

Populating heaven will not simply be the old lady who didn't give a penny to anyone, or the self-absorbed businessman who stabbed a few colleagues in the back along the way, or the gossip church lady who ran her mouth when she shouldn't. Heaven will have the worst of

sinner. The murderer. The rapist. The thief. The prostitute and the man who hired her. You pick your sin or your sinner and you're going to meet them in heaven.

Why? Because the worse we sin the greater God's grace becomes as God will not give one inch of glory to sin or Satan or anyone else. His grace is higher, stronger, tougher, deeper, wiser, and greater than all our sins.

The encouragement is not just general but intensely personal. My sin. Your sin. Our specific sins. Think of the worst thing you've ever done. Think of the worst thing you could ever do. God's grace is sufficient for even those sins.

How can I know? Who wrote the very verse we are studying? Paul. The man who assisted in the murder of Stephen the Martyr. *God can't save murderers. That's too wicked even for God.*

He can, he has, and he will extend his grace to you no matter how immoral you have been. He can even make them into an apostle of the church! Not just sins prior to salvation but all the sins of our lives. God's grace is greater than all our sin.

This is the gospel. The reign of grace. For all who put their faith in Jesus, his death for our sins, his resurrection for our eternal life, God's sovereign and all-powerful grace extends to us.

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