

Making the Need Obvious (5:20a)

5:20a *The Law came in so that the transgression would increase...*

What Law?

- The apostle is speaking about “*the Law*” given to old covenant Israel through Moses (contained in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), and specifically the moral components of that Law.
- The first quote from the O.T. moral Law will come in chapter 7, where Paul gives the Tenth Commandment as the representative of that Law: “*I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said [in Exodus 20:17// Deuteronomy 5:21], ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead*” (Romans 7:7,8).

Naming and Numbering

- The giving of God’s moral Law in the Old Testament did not reveal anything new or different, for the Law is an expression of God’s righteousness and holiness – eternal, unchanging realities of Who God is in Himself.
- The moral Law is an objective, quantifiable comparison of Who God is in His holiness and who we are in our sinful separation from Him.

- All human beings are inherently aware of their sinful dissonance with God’s righteousness and holiness. “*Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature...have clearly been seen,*” so that Paul can say that all humanity “*knew God*” (Romans 1:20,21). Further, God has created in every human being a conscience which is “*the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them*” (Romans 2:15). The revealed Law of God in the Bible, though, makes our sin explicitly clear.
- Illustration: the difference between Creation/conscience and the objective Law in the Bible is like the difference between seeing a picture of a stadium full of people and a numbered, written, exact census of how many people are in that stadium. From the mere picture you can see a great mass of people, but different people would give a different estimate concerning how many people it is. The specific census eliminates speculation and opinion, and makes the exact number perfectly clear. The Law of the Bible makes “*transgression...increase*” by objectively identifying it in all of our lives. We can no longer take a shallow look at humanity or make false assumptions (“all people are good”) – the Law, in clearly identifying transgression according to God’s standard, takes away all guessing.

Comparing Transgressions

- God holds humans accountable even if they’ve never read the Bible – He put a conscience in them that testifies to their violation of His will (Romans 2:12-16). But **the clearer the revelation from God is, the greater the level of accountability and punishment for violating it.**¹

¹ READ Matthew 11:20-24; 12:41,42; Luke 11:32.

- Adam and Eve transgressed against the clearly revealed Law of God concerning “*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*” (Genesis 2:17; 3:3,11,17). In the same way, old covenant Israel transgressed against the comprehensive and clear Law of God as given through Moses. The Law given increased transgression, for if “*sin is not imputed when there is no law*” (5:13), then an increased amount of revelation of God’s will in the Law will result in even more transgression listed against humanity.
- We might say it this way:
MORE LAW → MORE TRANSGRESSION OF LAW
- There is a profoundly important application to this for you and me: more personal regulation and Law-keeping efforts will never deliver us from the reign of sin and death. We need “*grace...[to] reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Romans 5:21b).² In fact, humanity’s sin nature means that “it is man’s nature to strive for what is forbidden.”³ For a person alienated from the Father because of sin, outside of faith-union with the Son, and devoid of the Holy Spirit, Law can only aggravate the sin nature to greater rebellion and frustration.

² The apostle Paul will later describe the futility of graceless self-effort this way: “*If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’ (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) - in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence*” (Colossians 2:20-23).

³ John Calvin (1509-1564), in his commentary on Romans 5:20.

The Place of the Law in Salvation History

- The Law of Moses did not change God’s Gospel promise to Abram that in him “*all the families of the earth will be blessed*” (Genesis 12:3//Galatians 3:8; see Revelation 5:9,10). “*Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ*” (Galatians 3:16). Paul is clear that the Law of Moses, given 500-700 years after Abraham, didn’t change God’s Gospel promise to save a people from out of “*all the families of the earth*” through the Christ Who was coming. We are told that the Law of Moses was given to highlight on the stage of human history the great need for Christ the Savior.
- The Exodus generation died in the desert instead of the Promised Land because of their lack of faith (Hebrews 3:16-4:2). The next generation, on the edge of the Promised Land, is asked this question by God Himself, “*what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?*” (Deuteronomy 4:8). Despite having God’s protection, provision, and clearly revealed Word, they rebelled against Him at every turn – this is the testimony of the Old Testament concerning God’s covenant people. Without new life in Christ and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, the people of God were driven to deeper and deeper levels of sin against God’s Law. Periods of self-improvement and self-effort revival were usually followed by even deeper and darker levels of apostasy. As Paul says, “*the Law came in so that the transgression would increase*” (Romans 5:20a). A human being trying to save himself or herself by trying to be good according to a moral code (even if it’s the Bible’s moral code) will inevitably fail.

Grace Greater Than All Our Sin (5:20b)

5:20b...but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more...

The Starting Point of the Gospel

- Unless there is a clear understanding of the scope of sin in our lives, we cannot receive God’s grace.
- We have to be told that we are lost in sin before salvation from sin can be presented in “*the gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24): “...God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:4-9). **You cannot understand, believe, sing, or speak of the Gospel rightly unless the Gospel begins with our being “dead in our transgressions,” and it is the Law of God that proves the reality of this death.**
- Paul describes the relationship between the Law and the Gospel in his letter to the churches of Galatia: “...*the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith*” (Galatians 3:22-24).

The Connection Between Sin and Grace

- It is logical that the greater a person’s understanding of sin according to the Law, the greater a person’s vision of the grace of God in Christ to forgive that sin.

- We see how this connection shows in a person’s life in the Gospels: “...*her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little*” (Luke 7:47).
- Similarly, **the person who has the clearest view of the magnitude of their sins and the size of the grace comparable to those sins will be the person who loves others the most and serves the Kingdom of God the most.** For Paul’s testimony of the connection between great sin and greater grace, READ 1 Corinthians 15:8-11; 1 Timothy 1:12-16. How that applies in your life, READ Colossians 3:12,13.
- The apostle will further teach us about the connection between sin and grace in Romans 6 (vss. 1,14,17).

The Latter Work of God Is Always Infinitely Greater

- As we’ve seen in this section (Romans 5:12-21), Paul repeatedly uses words that show the infinitely greater work of God in Jesus Christ: “...*much more... abound...much more...abundance...abounded...*”
- This is how God reveals and works: from the lesser (the Old Testament) to the greater (the New Testament), from the Law to the Gospel, from sin to grace, from earthly to heavenly, from temporal to eternal, from fleshly/bodily/physically to spiritually.

The Fruit of the Prince of This World (5:21a)

5:21a...so that, as sin reigned in death...

- Paul began this section (5:12-21) by telling us that “*through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death through sin*” and “*death spread to all men, because all sinned.*” He will tell us at the end of the next chapter that “*the wages of sin is death*” (6:23).
- In his teaching on the resurrection, the apostle proclaims, “*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Corinthians 15:56,57).

- The universal death of humanity is the fruit of the reign of sin over humanity. This is the reign of the devil. Sin reigns through death...when sin's power is broken, it's greatest weapon of control over us (death) is broken, too.

The Greater Kingdom Has Invaded This Age (5:21b)

5:21b...*even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Christ the King Loves Righteousness

- “...of the Son He [God the Father] says [in Psalm 45:6,7], ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness...’” (Hebrews 1:8,9). First, notice that the Father calls the Son “God” and recognizes His eternal throne as King. Second, notice that Christ the King loves righteousness and hates rebellion against God’s Law.
- “Grace” does not throw the righteous standard of God and His Law away. “Grace” leads to you and I, by faith-union with Christ the “Righteous One” (Exodus 9:27; Isaiah 53:11; Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14) and filled with the Holy Spirit, to begin growing in conformity with the Law of God.⁴

⁴ Remember, if you place obedience to God’s Law before justification by faith in Christ alone, you are not a Christian. Biblical Christianity places justification by faith in Christ alone first, and shows us that a fruit of true saving faith is obedience to God’s standard of righteousness (His Word).

His Gracious Reign Unto a Righteous Eternal Life

- Christ took our sin so that in Him we could “become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). This Christ, priest according to the order of Melchizedek (“king of righteousness,” Hebrews 7:2), reigns over a people who themselves should be growing in righteousness under His reign (Hebrews 5:13; 12:11). We should be seeking “first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).⁵
- As believers, we are to “put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Ephesians 4:24). His righteousness is our armor (Ephesians 6:14) and weapons in this world (2 Corinthians 6:7).
- The Holy Spirit, Who fills all believers in Jesus Christ, convicts concerning righteousness (John 16:8) and manifests the Kingdom of God through righteousness (Romans 14:17). He gave us the Bible to train us in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).
- You call Him Savior and Lord, but does the saving grace of the King “reign through righteousness” in your life?

⁵ As believers, “we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:15). See also Galatians 5:5;