

ROMANS Part 50

Chapter 5:20-21



Sin Versus Grace

Yet law came in by the way, that the offense should be increasing. Yet where sin increases, grace superexceeds that, even as Sin reigns in death, thus Grace also should be reigning through righteousness, for life eonian, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

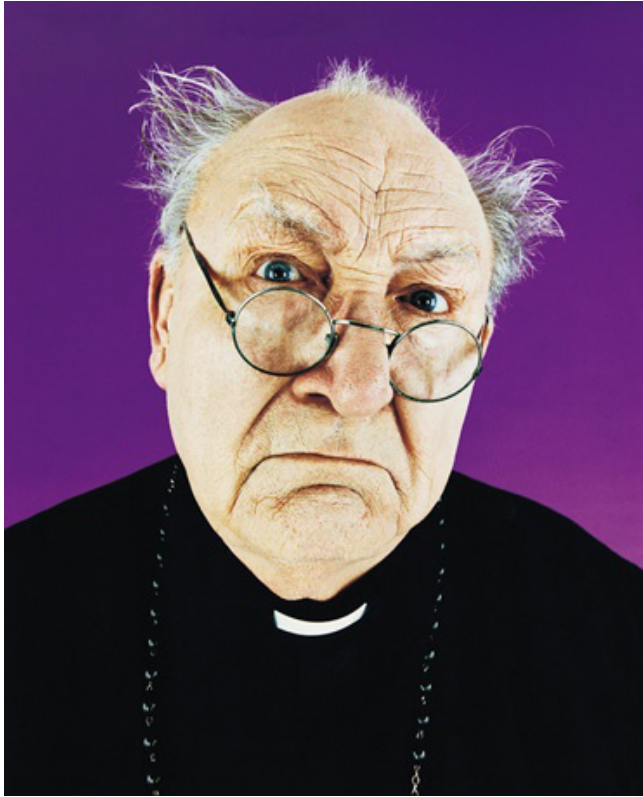
This is one of the most startling pronouncements of Scripture, namely, that the law came to make offense increase rather than decrease. When I first seriously studied this passage twenty-three years ago, I wondered if it was a misprint. Then I looked it up in other versions:

- ▶ **King James Version:** Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound.
- ▶ **Amplified Bible:** But then Law came in, [only] to expand and increase the trespass [making it more apparent and exciting opposition].
- ▶ **New International Version:** The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase.
- ▶ **New American Standard Bible:** The Law came in so that the transgression would increase
- ▶ **Young’s Literal Translation:** And law came in, that the offence might abound.
- ▶ **The Message:** All that passing laws against sin did was produce more lawbreakers.

I suppose the following statement is still more of a shock: “Yet where sin increases, grace superexceeds.” Really? Since this verse has been in the Bible for such a long time, why wasn’t I ever notified of it? It faceslaps everything I was ever taught. I thought that the more sin, the more doom; the more sin, the more disappointed (shocked, really) God became; the more sin, the less chance of getting into heaven. I thought that, the more sin, the more prayers I needed to get deliverance from it.

If sin only increased grace then why, when I was a Catholic, did the nuns line me up outside that confessional every month and push me in? Why did I have to confess stuff that produced such a satisfactory outcome? Didn’t the priest at my church know this verse?

Father Passoli should have exited his little confessional cubicle, opened my sorry little door, put his hand on my sorry little fourth-grade shoulder and said, “Well, Zender, I would like to condemn you for everything you just told me, believe me I would. I would love more than anything to load your profane and quivering buttocks with so many ‘Hail Marys’ and ‘Our Fathers’ that you forget your own name. If it was up to me, Zender, you would be saying penance until the Second Coming.



“Zender, you have just caused grace to increase to what may be a diocese record.”

But it’s not up to me. Why, Zender? Why isn’t it up to me? Because you have done something I have never witnessed in all my years of sneaking Cabernet Sauvignon from the rectory supply cupboard. You have just caused grace to increase to what may be a diocese record. I’ve not seen the likes of it. There was an actual glow coming from your side of the little sin box. It had an orange hue. It smelled like Pine-Sol, for which I cannot account.

“Zender, this is a remarkable achievement. I can’t deny it; I would deny it if I could, you know that. It has taken me by a surprise which I have not known since discovering Father Kaylor in the lavatory with a plunger and a can of Cool Whip. And so, on behalf of the other priests and myself—and of every Sister of the alternative order of the Sacred Liver of Joseph—I hereby recognize your singular achievement in the field of Grace Exploration, in which field you are clearly a pioneer. A certificate signed by Bishop Malone shall be forthcoming. Congratulations, dirty dog. Now get the hell out of here before I thrash you—or worse.”

I can tell you one thing: this passage is great news for sinners. If you are a sinner, then you ought to carry this verse in your wallet. Have this verse printed on a card and laminated so that you can whip it out and hold it before the faces of Sin-meisters who insist that only right behavior can keep you right with God. Just whip out your handy laminated card, hold it up to the face of your accuser and say, “Well, unfortunately for you *and* your sick plans for my life, not only does right behavior *not* keep me right with God, but the more I sin, the more God likes me.” Your accuser will then say, “Why are you holding a Subway card in my face?” at which time you will calmly walk away fondling your Subway card. Once clear of your detractor, return the Subway card to your wallet—this time *behind* your laminated Romans 5:20 card—and then carry on in your state of happiness.

SOURCE OF THE MARVEL

I’m always trying to figure out where these startling statements come from. Where do they start? What inspires them? Why are they necessary? Paul had just been talking about offense in Romans 5:15-16, so let’s return to the preceding context and get a running start on what will be a great revelation—

But not as the offense, thus also the grace. For if, by the offense of the one, the many died, much rather the grace of God and the gratuity in grace, which is of the One Man, Jesus Christ, to the many superabounds. **16** And not as through one act of sinning is the gratuity. For, indeed, the judgment is out of one into condemnation, yet the grace is out of many offenses into a just award.

Religious people can’t get over sins and offenses. They love to talk about sins and offenses. In spite of Christ’s coming, they think that sins and offenses carry eternal consequences.

First, what is the difference between a sin and an offense? A sin is when one misses the mark, that is, does something wrong. An offense is the result of a sin and is a personal affront. It’s one thing to do wrong, but another thing to hurt someone’s feelings. Adam not only did wrong, but he hurt God’s feelings. He did this at the same time. It’s not as though we have a sin here, and an offense over there. It’s the same act but with different consequences. A sin will reap trouble on one’s own head, while the offensive nature of the misdeed damages another’s sensibilities.

God clearly came across upset in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned and offended Him, but as I have already shared with you,

For to vanity was the creation subjected, not voluntarily, but because of Him Who subjects it, in expectation that the creation itself, also, shall be freed from the slavery of corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God. —Romans 8:20-21

Eden was a set-up. God caused Adam and Eve to disobey His revealed will so that He could fulfill His ultimate intention. This was His *ultimate* will. God increased the level of sin and offense purposely so that humanity could become embroiled in sin and death so that God could eventually free it from the slavery of corruption through the “much more” sacrifice of His son, which could not be “much more” of anything unless there was something to be “much more” over, which was Adam’s sin and the ensuing mortality. I am not making this up. Who could make up such a thing? The words on the page are as plain as can be. You’re reading this yourself in the above verse as well as in Romans 5:20: “Yet law came in by the way, that the offense should be increasing. Yet where sin increases, grace superexceeds.”

WONDERVERSE

Have you ever seen this verse? Romans 5:20? Orthodox Christianity doesn’t know what to do with it, so they sweep it under the church carpet. The entire book of Romans buffaloes them, but especially Romans 8:20 and Romans 5:20. These two verses, alone, destroy everything that the world’s most popular religious sect holds dear. Romans 8:20 destroys the notion that Adam—or any of us—decided freely to become enmeshed in sin and death. Romans 5:20 destroys the notion that the Ten Commandments came to improve humanity’s moral fiber. (In a nutshell, the law came to show the righteousness of God and the inability of human beings to attain to this righteousness.) Christians are still fighting to get the Ten Commandments posted in schools and government buildings. In some cases, they are succeeding. How do I know? I’ve read the newspaper and noticed the increase in offenses.

No, I did not write Romans 5:20, but I am happy to popularize it. In the absolute viewpoint, God is so *not* troubled by offense that He institutes something that He knows will not only fail to make humanity righteous (it fails by design) but will increase (not decrease) the very offenses that people think frustrate Him so much: the law of Moses. Either God is a miscalculating lunatic, or He has something up His sleeve with law that He wanted kept secret until Romans 5:20.



“BY THE WAY”

Romans 5:20 gives us the true function of the law. It came in “by the way.” The *Concordant Literal New Testament* brings this out better than any other translation. The Greek word here is a mouthful: *pareiserchomai*. It’s a three-part word whose English elements are: BESIDE-INTO-COME. It means, “off the path; not a normal course; a sidetrack.” A regular road would “come into” a place; a route that would be “beside” that road would be a rabbit-trail of sorts that would lead somewhere other than the terminus of the road.

This word is used again in Galatians 2:4—

Yet, it was because of the false brethren who were smuggled in, who came in by the way to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they shall be enslaving us—

The false brethren came in “by the way,” that is, not by the regular road but sneakily; Paul says that they were “smuggled in.”

Thus also, the law came in sneakily. It was not normal. It was not ultimately meant to be part of the regular road to salvation. We might say that God smuggled it in. All of this suggests that God intended something for the law that He did not immediately make apparent. What He immediately made apparent was that the law was to be obeyed, “or else.” Israel said that they would do it, “or else.” This played perfectly into God’s hands (of course), for His ultimate intention was to show this nation—and all humanity through her example—the impossibility of flesh to accomplish His righteous dictates. This had to

be shown not by mere theory, but by long, hard experience. The ensuing “we give up!” would lead humanity to at last find its rest and peace in Christ. This was and is God’s master plan—and still unknown to Christianity. Thus, Romans 8:2-4:

For the spirit’s law of life in Christ Jesus frees you from the law of sin and death. For what was impossible to the law, in which it was infirm through the flesh, did God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sin’s flesh and concerning sin, He condemns sin in the flesh, that the just requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who are not walking in accord with flesh, but in accord with spirit.

DESIGNED TO FAIL

What was impossible to the law. There it is. Due to the weakness of human flesh, it was impossible for the law to fulfill in people the just requirements of its own dictates. How creative of God! Why then would God ask a people to do an impossible thing? For the same reason He asked Adam and Eve not to eat of the delicious fruit that He placed, fence-less, smack-dab in the middle of the garden: *necessary experience*.

Failing God is a necessary experience given to humanity “not voluntarily” (Romans 8:20). Of course not voluntarily. Who wants to learn anything by long hard experience? We’d rather see the PowerPoint presentation in a conference room while sipping coffee from a Styro-foam cup. Just give us the theory. But no. It doesn’t work that way. We’ve got to feel it, smell it, and cry it out. We’ve got to end up flat on our faces. The decimation must be real so that the ensuing longing and deliverance is reality times ten. We need to be rescued, so we cry out for a Rescuer. This is no theoretical breaking. This is tears-into-the-carpet, life-and-death pain. In the midst of such brokenness, who can satisfy the cry of our hearts and spirits other than the Lord Jesus Christ and His “much rather” salvation?

IN ACCORD WITH HUMAN NATURE

In the nuts-and-bolts department, why can’t people just do the law? Why couldn’t Adam and Eve just not think about the forbidden tree? Chalk this up to a God-designed element of human nature: giving human beings a law makes them want to break it. We will be discussing this in further detail in Romans chapter seven, but here

is a sneak preview from Romans 7:7-9—

Sin I knew not except through law. For besides, I had not been aware of coveting except the law said, “You shall not be coveting.” Now Sin, getting an incentive through the precept, produces in me all manner of coveting. For apart from law Sin is dead ... at the coming of the precept Sin revives.

It’s the lure of forbidden fruit. Don’t blame yourself when it happens; God designed you so that laws actually excite your need to break them. This is why the most effective prescription against sin is not law, but grace. Crazy, huh? No. God.

THE DESIRED EFFECT

The law’s desired effect, and the reason God inaugurated it, was to alter the character of sin so that it became an offense. Not only would people be making mistakes now (and more of them), but they would be insulting God. Adam not only sinned against God’s one and only law in the garden and screwed up his own life, but he stiff-armed His Maker’s wishes. Because of law, Israel now sins against great light (the law is perfect and righteous) rather than in ignorance. Sinning against light greatly increases the sinfulness of sin. Yet this is what God wanted. He wanted the coming grace to super-exceed the offense. Since God had tons of grace coming, He needed to increase the heck out of the offense. He did this with law. God loves imbalance. He sticks us in incredibly deep holes, only to set us upon mountaintops.

There it is, then. Read the above paragraph until you get it. This is the secret of the law, the secret of sin and death, and the secret of God’s ultimate intention to bless all humanity. But it’s not a secret at all. Only to those hardened against it does this gorgeous light stay covered. As our Lord rightly said, the traditions and teachings of men will obscure God’s truth every time. To you and to me, however, God has given eyes to see and ears to hear what has long been written. Romans 5:21—

... that, even as Sin reigns in death, thus Grace also should be reigning through righteousness, for life eonian, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

See you next week as we start Chapter 6. —MZ