The Law and the Reign of Grace

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[0:00] Let's take a seat and open your Bibles up to Romans chapter 5.

I realize now that we've been in Romans chapter 5 for several weeks, but this is our last week in this chapter. This is our third week covering verses 12 through 21, and we'll finish up with that passage this morning and begin moving into chapter 6 next week.

But we're going to be once again right here, and so we're going to begin this morning in verse 12 again, read all the way down to the end of the chapter. So I'm going to ask you guys to stand up. If you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs, it's on page 942.

The Apostle Paul writes, Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned, for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.

Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass, for if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God, and the free gift by the grace of that one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many.

[1:28] And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin, for the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

For if because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign through the one man, Jesus Christ.

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.

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but were 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.

Father, we give you thanks that your spirit inspired Paul to write these words. We thank you for the depth of understanding that they give us of the gospel, and we thank you for the beauty of Christ displayed in them, and ask that we might see that beauty once more this morning.

[2:38] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. A few years ago, we took a family trip to Walt Disney World in Florida, and it was not just our family, it was also Allie's family, so her sister and her family, her brother and his family, and her parents also went.

Now we wanted to avoid, we were going in the fall, November, December's time, we knew that, and we wanted to avoid those holiday crowds that you hear about all the time, so we just decided that we would go when most people were in school.

We wouldn't go during the Christmas break, we wouldn't go Thanksgiving week. We would just choose a week in that time when everyone else was still in school, and things were kind of humming along at their normal pace, so that we wouldn't have to deal with the crowds.

But to do that, we needed to take Nate out of school. He was in second grade at the time, he was the only one of the kids old enough to actually be in school, and so we needed to take him out of school, and we decided that we would leave sort of in the middle of the week, so that we would take him out of school in the middle of the day.

Now we didn't tell him all of this. We didn't tell the kids any of this information. He went to school that morning like usual, and we were leaving in the afternoon, and so we knew that we would come to pick him up just sort of mid-afternoon, a couple of hours before he would normally have been let out of school.

[3:53] So we came up to the school to get him, and we thought he would be really excited to leave school early, even though he didn't know what it was for, and he wouldn't come out of the school. In fact, they came out and said, he's really, really mad, and he's not leaving.

And we couldn't figure out what was going on, and so I went in to see, you know, what's the deal, what's the problem. Well, the problem was, his class was about to go play dodgeball, which was the highlight of his week.

I think the only reason that Nate went to school in second grade was the glimmer of hope that he might get to hit another kid in the face with a ball on that day. It just might happen. And now he's waited, and dodgeball is right there, and we've snatched it away.

We're coming to take him away from dodgeball. And he was really mad. We finally got him to come outside where his, you know, his cousins and his parents and brothers were waiting, and so he could see that we were doing something special, and we told him what we were doing, and then he was really excited, all right?

But there's sort of a pattern at work there that I think happens oftentimes in our lives, and that is that something good presents itself to us, like getting to leave school early.

[5:05] But unfortunately, that something good brings with it some bad results, like missing out on a dodgeball game. But if we could see the big picture, if we could see the real purpose for having to leave school early that day, we would see that there's a greater good in mind than the bad that you sort of have to experience along the way.

That's a pattern that I see oftentimes in our lives and even in the Scriptures itself, that something good comes along that immediately results in something bad, and so our vision is clouded, we're frustrated, we're upset, or we don't understand why things are the way they are.

But if we could see the bigger plan, if we could see the bigger purpose, we would see that there's something really, really good in store for us. That's a pattern that I actually see in these last couple of verses of this passage that we've been looking at, where Paul finally begins at the very end to turn his attention to the law.

Notice what he says here in verses 20 and 21. He says, So the law is the good thing that comes in, yet it results in an increase of sin, an increase of a trespass, but all that was so that grace might increase as well, so that grace might abound even more than sin itself.

So you have something good coming in, which is the law, the God's law, the law of Moses that God gave on Mount Sinai. We typically only think of the Ten Commandments, but there are over 600 commandments that God gave to Moses on the mountain.

[6:46] And that law is good. It's a good thing, and yet Paul says it leads to bad results. Rather than getting rid of sin, rather than curbing sin, rather than helping us to sin less, it actually increases the trespass, he says.

But all of that is a part of God's plan, so that grace might abound more and more. Now you might ask, why does he take this up here? Why does Paul, all of a sudden, at the end of this passage, begin to talk about the role of the law?

Because he has, in this last part of chapter 5, he has sort of painted a picture of the gospel for us in cosmic dimensions. I mean, in dimensions from creation all the way to final, ultimate redemption.

This is the big picture that he's painting for us of God's plan of salvation in this last half of Romans chapter 5, so that we've moved all the way from Adam, in whom we all fell, to Christ, in whom we have redemption and justification and life.

It's the big picture of salvation. You can see it pretty clearly summed up for us very nicely and neatly in verse 18. He says, Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

[8:06] There it is. There's the contrast between Adam and the second Adam, between Adam who sinned and Christ who lived a life of perfect righteousness in our place.

And for the last two weeks, we've been wrestling with, we've been trying to understand exactly what Paul is teaching us in this passage about the roles of Adam and Christ and how they relate to us.

And just to put it in quick summary, we have said that Adam stood as our representative, that Adam, as the head of the human race and the parent of all of his descendants, stood as our representative in the garden, so that when Adam sinned and broke God's commandment not to eat the tree, the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we also sinned in Adam.

We were involved in that. Adam is our head and representative, sinned and fell, and so in Adam we sinned and fell, and so because of Adam we die.

Because of Adam we're born with a sinful nature. Because of Adam, condemnation hangs over us. But then we also said that Christ has come as a kind of second Adam, another head of the human race, so that all those who are in Christ, all those who trust in Christ, have Christ's obedience counted as ours.

[9:27] So that because of Christ, we can have life. Because of Christ, we can have justification. We can have our condemnation in Adam reversed.

We can have the death that we were dealt in Adam turned into life. So that the counting of Adam's sin as our sin is no longer bad news, because we realize that in the same way, Christ's righteousness can be counted as ours.

That's a big picture of salvation. That's Adam all the way to Jesus, and even the consummation of history, with Christ standing victorious.

That's a big picture. But if you were a Jewish person listening to Paul explain the gospel, listening to Paul lay things out, and you heard this portion of the book of Romans, you might think in your mind, but Paul, what does the law of Moses have to do with any of that?

You've forgotten something. You've left out Moses. You can't forget Moses. You can't forget the law that God gave to His people. Why can't this law, rather than Christ's righteousness, why can't it be the means of us gaining life?

[10:41] Why? Why have you forgotten about the law? Why have you skipped over it? Are you not a Jew? Do you not understand these things, Paul? Where has the law gone in your theology? If you were a Jew at any time period, but particularly in the first century, hearing Paul teach these things, immediately you would think, Paul, your theology is off because you have neglected the law, that great gift that God gave to His people. Now, he has not altogether neglected the law in this passage. He does mention it as sort of an aside in verses 13 and 14, but he hasn't really tied the law in to this big picture of falling in Adam and being redeemed by Christ.

He hasn't tied it in, and that's something that he has to do. Because the law for Paul is not some antiquated, old thing from the past.

It's still God's Word. It's still important for the Apostle Paul. In fact, as we read through chapters 1 through 4, we saw the law quoted and cited and alluded to over and over and over again.

Paul makes use of the law of Moses to prove his point over and over throughout those chapters. So the law is not something that Paul has just left behind. The law is not something that Paul has forgotten about.

[12:04] But nevertheless, he has painted the law in somewhat of a negative light. He has said that no one is justified. Nobody gets right with God on the basis of obedience to the law, by the works of the law.

And so you're wondering at this point in Romans, then what's the point of the law? What do we do with it? It is God's Word. So what do we do with this law that it seems as if has no place in your big picture of salvation history from Adam to Jesus?

What place does the law have? And that's what he's going to help us to begin to understand here at the very end of Romans 5. And he'll pick this topic back up in chapter 7 and go into more detail.

And so I just want us this morning to think about that pattern of something good that brings about something bad that results in an ultimate, even greater good in the end. And I want us to take that scheme and lay it over these two verses and try to understand exactly how that pattern is fulfilled in Paul's understanding of the law.

So look back again with me at these verses and we'll try to understand. The good thing, of course, is, as I said earlier, the good thing is the law. Now you might not think that it's a good thing the way that Paul has described it so far.

[13:22] And in fact, even what he says in verse 20 almost paints the law in a negative light. Most translations say something similar to the English Standard Version. Now the law came in.

But that word came in usually has a negative connotation to it. In fact, it means something here like the law slipped in or the law sort of snuck in.

And so you almost see something bad is going to result here. We have this grand, glorious picture of God saving us, redeeming us from the fall of Adam in the righteousness of Christ.

And yet in the midst of that, he says, Now, in that big picture of history, the law slipped in, snuck in on the scene, as it were, came in.

But it is still nevertheless a good thing. Listen, just listen to some of these verses. You don't have to turn, but I want you to listen to some of what King David says about the law of God in Psalm 119.

[14:26] Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the entire Bible, and the whole thing is devoted to the law of God, the word of God. Just a few verses. Verse 18, David says, Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

Verse 33, he says, Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will keep it to the end. Give me understanding that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

So the law for David is a source of joy, a source of delight, not a bad thing, not a negative thing. Verse 97, he says, Oh, how I love your law.

It is my meditation all the day. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. Verse 113, I hate the double-minded, but I love your law.

Over and over, he loves the law. He delights in the law. One more. Verse 165, Great peace have those who love your law. Nothing can make them stumble.

[15:31] I hope for your salvation, O Lord, and I do your commandments. My soul keeps your testimonies. I love them exceedingly, he says. Very much so. David loves the law of God, and I don't think that Paul has forgotten about what David says about the law as a source of delight and joy, and that we ought to love God's law.

I don't think Paul has forgotten that at all. In fact, if you look over to chapter 7, one page over in most of your Bibles, Paul says in verse 12, The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and righteous, and good.

It's a good thing, but this good thing snuck in. It slipped in. And the good thing has brought about devastating results.

Notice what he says. Now, the law came in to increase the trespass. It didn't come in and curb sin. That's what we might think.

We might think, well, God obviously gave us all of these rules. He gave Israel the law so that he could, you know, kind of control their behavior a little bit. Set some boundaries for their behavior.

[16:46] Keep them from wandering too far. And the law is going to do that. The law is going to keep them hemmed in. The law is going to keep them from becoming more sinful. But in fact, Paul says, it does just the opposite.

It increases the trespass. Now, I think that the law increases our sin in two ways. Number one, the law increases our sin by provoking us to more sin.

We all know that there are times when it's not until we hear a rule, it's not until we hear a law that we're tempted to disobey the rule or the law. You may not even know that a certain law exists, but the moment you hear it, you're tempted to break it so that if you tell a child not to climb on something, don't climb on that stack of chairs.

I say that a lot because we have some of the church chairs in our garage. Don't climb on that stack of chairs. You can almost guarantee that when you leave the room, they're going to climb the stack of chairs. But there's a good chance that if you'd never mentioned the stack of chairs, they'd have never seen the stack of chairs, that it never occurred to them to climb the stack of chairs.

But there's something about us as sinful fallen people that when we hear a rule, when we hear a law or a commandment, there is a part of us that's tempted to break the commandment simply because the commandment exists.

[18:04] And the law certainly does that sometimes. There are times when the law of Moses, even God's good, holy, precious law in which we ought to delight, instead provokes us to sin.

I don't, however, think that that's what Paul has in mind right here. Because there's another way in which the law increases a trespass.

And that is that it takes a normal, ordinary sin and it turns it into not merely sin, but law-breaking. Or the language of Paul in the book of Romans, it transforms sin into transgression.

A transgression is actually disobeying a clearly spoken word from God. Whereas sin is violating the sense of right that we have.

Sin is failing to give to God the glory that He rightfully deserves. Transgression is a specific violation of God's law. And when Paul says that the law slipped in, it snuck in in order to increase the trespass, what he means, I think here, is that the law came in to turn regular, ordinary sin into transgression, into a violation of God's word.

[19:21] Now why would I say that? I say that partly because of what Paul says earlier in this passage, in the one other place in which he mentions the law in kind of an aside.

Look back up to verses 13 and 14. Now I'll go ahead and say to you at the outset that a part of the reason that I did not say much about verses 13 and 14 over the last two weeks is that these are the two most difficult verses in this entire passage.

They're difficult to connect. They're difficult to understand. And so we tried to get a big picture of what this passage is saying, but we'll dive into these details just for a moment now, okay?

Verse 13, he's just said that all sin, all right, and now in verse 13 he's going to clarify what he means by that. Clarify the entrance of death into the world. What does he mean?

Verse 13. For sin indeed was in the world before the law was given. But, he says, sin is not counted where there is no law.

[20:23] Now mark that down in your minds. Sin, he says, existed before the law came in. So before Moses received the Ten Commandments and the other laws on Mount Sinai, sin existed.

And that's as plain as day when you read through Genesis. The flood happened before Moses received the law and yet the flood came as God's judgment upon the sinfulness of mankind.

So people sinned before the law was even given. Sin existed. But, he says, but where there is no law, sin is not counted.

What could that possibly mean to say that sin is not counted where there is no law? I think he means that sin is not counted as transgression.

Sin is not counted as a clear violation of God's law. In fact, take a look up in chapter 4. In chapter 4, Paul is in the midst of discussing Abraham's faith.

[21:30] The nature of Abraham's faith. But, listen to what he says in verse 15. He says, in contrast to Abraham's faith, you have the law.

And the law brings wrath. But, where there is no law, there is no transgression. Where there is no law, in other words, there can be no law breaking.

So, I think that when Paul says in chapter 5, verse 13, that where there is no law, sin is not counted, I think what he means is, where there is no law, sin, which does exist, sin is not counted as law breaking.

There is no transgression. Now, that may make no difference to you. You may think, I don't care about the semantics of it. It doesn't matter to me whether you call it a sin or a transgression. But it matters greatly to Paul.

He shows us why it matters in verse 14. He says, In other words, in Paul's mind, in the absence of a law that specifies death as the penalty for breaking it, you cannot have the penalty enforced.

[22:53] In other words, even though we all might have a sense that something is wrong, which Paul talks about in Romans chapter 1 and especially in chapter 2, we all have a sense. He says, We have the work of the law written upon our heart.

> There's a real genuine sense in which every human being on the planet understands God's basic moral laws. We all understand them. Nevertheless, Paul is saying here though, but in the absence of a specific law that promises death when it is broken, you cannot have sin counted as transgression and therefore you cannot have the penalty of death enforced upon that particular sin.

> It cannot exist. And what he's saying here, his argument here is, listen, death existed between Adam who broke a specific command. God said, If you eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the day that you eat of it, you will die.

So there's a commandment and there's a punishment of death that comes along with breaking the commandment. And then you have the law of Moses that comes along centuries later that tells us all these various commandments.

And if you break these commandments over and over, the law says, you will die. But in between, everybody died, even though they didn't break a commandment that promised death as a penalty.

[24:10] They all still died. Read the genealogies of Genesis. So-and-so was born, lived X number of years, he had kids, and then he lived X number of years after that, and then he died.

So-and-so was born, he lived X number of years, he had kids, he lived so many years after that, and then he died. Everybody, over and over, they all die. I think that's what Paul has in the back of his mind when he says, everybody died between Adam and Moses.

It's recorded for us. In Genesis, we know it as a fact of history. There's nobody alive today walking around on the earth who was alive before the flood. They all died, he says.

They died. But how did they die if there wasn't a commandment for them to break that promised death as a penalty?

You could fall back to Romans 2. You could say, they died because they had God's law, the work of the law, on their heart, and because they had the work of the law on their heart, they knew in their heart that what they were doing deserved death.

[25:15] And I think that that's true. But then if you ask the further question, why is that law written there on their hearts? And where does this sense of the penalty of death come from?

Look back real quickly. Romans chapter 1 and 2. I'll show it to you just in case you guys don't remember. It's been a while since we were there. In chapter 1, starting in verse 18, he sort of details the sinfulness of the non-Jewish, Gentile people.

And then he says in verse 32 at the end of that chapter, though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them so they know God's decree.

What decree? The general basic rule enshrined in the law for us now that those who do these sorts of things ought to die. And then he says over in chapter 2, verse 12, all who have sinned without the law will perish without the law.

All who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. So there's a perishing apart from the law here because they've sinned. And he says in chapter 1 that they know the penalty for their sins ought to be death.

[26:31] And so you could say, Paul, we don't need an explanation for why people died between Adam and Moses. We've got it. The law written on their hearts is sufficient enough for us. We don't need a further explanation. But Paul wants us to push further.

Now, I understand that sometimes we don't want to push our thinking further, but Paul's making us push it further and I've got to cover every verse in this book. So we're going to do it. Alright? So, if you ask the further question from chapter 2, where does this innate knowledge of God's moral standards come from?

Where does this innate internal knowledge of the death penalty due for such behavior come from? In other words, how do they know God's righteous decree if they don't have God's righteous decree?

Adam had it. God spoke it to him. Moses and the Jews have it. God gave it to him on the mountain. But what about all these Gentiles that he's talking about in chapter 1? How do they know this decree?

Where does it come from? The answer would be it's written on their hearts because they are, in fact, descendants of Adam. Because they possess the image of God that Adam had passed down to them.

[27:40] Yes, Adam passes down a sinful nature to us, but nevertheless, he still passes down the image of God to us. And written upon that image is the memory of God's commands to Adam, I believe, in the garden.

So even the punishment that Paul promises for those who do not have the law in chapter 2, it comes to them because they're in Adam. All of this is tied back together.

It only comes to them because they're in Adam. And now Paul's digging beneath that and he's saying, now, ultimately, in Adam, why do we all die? Because of his sin. Because Adam broke a specific command.

Eat this fruit, you die. Why do we die? Because he ate that fruit and our lives are a testimony to our having inherited that from Adam.

Our innate knowledge of the moral law, our innate knowledge of the penalty due for breaking that law, all comes from Adam. and our condemnation ultimately rests not even in our breaking of that knowledge written upon our heart, but in Adam's first failure.

[28:48] Now, ask the question, okay, if we all fall because Adam broke a law and the penalty for Adam's failure was enforced even before you brought the law of Moses into the world, then why bother bringing the law of Moses into the world?

Why interrupt that very simple story, Adam fell, millennia later Jesus came and succeeded where Adam fell and now we can have life through Jesus.

That's a nice, neat, easy to tell story. Why then do we have the rest of the Old Testament? Why is that story interrupted with law?

Because the law comes in Exodus. The second book of the Bible comes in early. Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, primarily commands.

Law. That's what we get in those books. The rest of the Old Testament beginning in Joshua all the way down to the end, those little books that you can't remember the names of, the rest of the Old Testament is just a commentary upon the law that was given on the mountain.

[30:05] You have the history of Israel which is a history of their failure to obey the law. You have the writings of the prophets which is a reflection of the prophets upon the failure of Israel to obey the law that God gave on the mountain.

So the rest of the Old Testament from Exodus to the end, you wonder if we had a nice neat story with just Genesis.

In fact, just the first three chapters of Genesis and then jump to Jesus. It's clean. It's neat. It's easy to understand even if there's deep theology. Then why did the law slip in?

Why, God, did you send it in to human history? Why is it even there? We know it's good. It's good because it comes from your hand. It's holy and righteous.

But why bother? And the answer is very simple. The law came in to increase the trespass. What?

[31:04] The law came in so that not merely would Adam's sin be counted as a transgression, but now all those who possess the written law of God.

So the Jewish people throughout the centuries and now all of us who have heard God's written law proclaimed so that all of us would have our normal, ordinary sin transformed into transgression and made even worse in God's eyes.

That's the bad news. That's the bad part of this scheme. The law is good and it comes in and yet the law, because we are sinful and fallen, the law only produces things that are worse for us.

The law does not bring good things out of sinful people. The law merely turns sin into transgression and provokes furthermore sinning down the line.

That's why the law was brought in. But that's not the ultimate reason why the law was brought in. It's not. There's a bigger plan at work here.

[32:10] Notice, the law came in to increase the trespass. But where sin increased, that is, where sin was turned into transgression, 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.

The law came in so that there would be a bigger obstacle, a higher hurdle for Jesus to leap and for the grace of God to overcome. God's grace is powerful beyond measure and no matter how great our sin becomes, no matter how great in our own eyes or in God's eyes our sin becomes, Paul is saying here, the grace of God revealed in Christ overcomes that.

In fact, God increased sin. He turned sin into transgression by giving the law so that there would be a higher bar. So that grace would need to show its greater power over sin and transgression.

That's the reason. That's the purpose. God's goal here is to magnify His own grace in Christ. And that really is the story of the Bible.

[33:29] The story of the Bible is not merely the story of the fall of man, the entrance of law and commentary on law. Once you take a look at the entire story and you read all the pieces, it's really about the triumph of grace to the glory of God in Christ over all our sin no matter how great it might be.

And the path is simple. It's not a complicated path. So that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign. How? Through righteousness.

What righteousness? What righteousness? The righteousness of Jesus counted to all those who trust in Him. Grace reigns when Christ's righteousness is counted to us which leads to eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Paul's aim in this passage and God's aim in all of history is to magnify the grace of God in Christ so that the glory of God might abound in the world, in history, and in our hearts.

See, the Bible is an interesting book because as helpful as it can be for us, as much instruction as it might give us on how to live life, it is not primarily a book designed to teach us how to live life.

[35:03] It's just not the primary purpose of the Bible. The primary purpose of the Bible is to display the glory of God in the face of Christ. That's what the Bible exists to do.

And if you approach this book merely looking for tips, helpful advice, a list of things to do to make your life go better, you will find some of those scattered in its pages but most of this book will remain a mystery to you.

If I as a preacher make it my goal to pull out nuggets from this book to help you live better lives, I will ignore 99% of what is written in this book and I will just say the same things over and over week after week from my same favorite passages of scripture that highlight those things.

But this is a book not about how you can live a better life, not about how you can order things more correctly in your life. This is a book about the glory of God in the face of Christ overcoming all obstacles and in fact in the face of obstacles God's glory and God's grace magnified as they overcome greater obstacles.

And my goal as a preacher week in and week out is simple. To help you see and love the glory of God in the face of Christ as it's revealed in whatever passage we're covering.

[36:34] And here this morning I encourage you to think of your own sin whatever it is. To think of your own law breaking your own misdeeds.

Contrast them with the grace of God in Christ and see them dwarfed And see them in comparison made to look as if they are nothing.

Grace of God in Christ reigning through his righteousness is the point of the Bible. And to the degree that you learn to love and savor and rejoice in that message to the degree that you learn to do that to that degree does your life matter and are you successful?

This is not a book that aims to tell us ten things to do so that your marriage is better. Five things to do to be a better parent. Eight things to do so you're better at work. It's not a book that aims to do that.

It aims to do one simple thing make you to rejoice and exult in Jesus Christ. So exult in him and in his grace which far outstrips the power of your sin.

[37:55] Let's pray.