

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor

[Swift Creek Baptist Church.com](http://SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com), 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834

7/27/08

Romans 5:20-21 “The Marvelous Grace of God”

Intro. In vv.12-21 of this chapter, Paul mentions sin 10 times. Perhaps the most picturesque is when he says in v.21, “sin reigned.” You and I are living in a world where sin reigns. Here we see sin personified as an evil ruler over men. It’s as if Paul draws back the curtain to expose the one who reigns over men to their harm & destruction. Look at him with your imagination. He is evil, dark, without mercy, and with a deadly cold heart.

This evil ruler has many ways to control his subjects. First, he controls us from within using our own sin nature. We all have a strong bent toward sin & self-centered behavior. Sin also rules over men with peer pressure. God created men with a conscience, and people feel much better about themselves if they can pressure others to join them in doing wrong. Of course, his chief ally is Satan. He works with Satan to establish a kingdom of darkness.

We were all born into the kingdom of sin, and we all come under its evil control. Not one person is exempt from the problem of sin, for Paul rightly says in v.12 that “all sinned.” There is no more conclusive proof of the tremendous power of Sin over us, than the way He deceives people into thinking that He is a benevolent ruler over them. Men imagine that they are free even while Sin enslaves them. He is an enemy to his subjects, yet they love, obey, and serve him with delight.

Another proof of Sin’s reign is that fact that death is universal. Paul said in v.21 that “sin reigned in death.” Paul said in v.12 that “death spread to all men, because all sinned.” After a lifetime of ruling men & women in a living death, Sin delights in completing his evil dominion. Paul said in 1 Cor. 15:56 that “the sting of death is sin.” Sin inserts its poisonous stinger to bring about the end of what little life people have. Death is universal, for sin is universal. Billions and billions have died since Sin entered the world. “Oh Sin, how many more must die? Why must even children, teenagers, & young adults die?” Sin & Satan just laugh. After all, Prov. 30:16 says that the grave is never satisfied.

What a terrible problem we have! Who can set us free from the dominion of Sin? Who can deliver us from its cold grip of death? Well in this brief text of Scripture, Paul mentions two other rulers that are seeking to exercise rule over your life in place of Sin. One is the Law, and the other is the grace of God. Which one can set you free? Let’s seek to discover the answer to that question this morning. First of all:

I. CAN THE LAW OF MOSES DELIVER US?

Many in the Jewish & Christian traditions believe that the way to be set free from the dominion of Sin is to pursue obedience to the reign of Law. The Law demands obedience, and warns of deadly consequences for disobedience. Many in secular society also believe that passing laws is the way to control people’s sinful behavior. Though our country was founded to set us free from government tyranny, we are living today under more and more government control over our lives through laws and regulations. Though we may agree about the limited effectiveness of secular law, what about the Law of Moses found in the Bible? Can those laws set you free from sin’s control? Well let’s see what Paul says here in our text. In v.20 we see that:

A. The Law Was Added Alongside Grace – Paul said in v.20, “Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound.” The word translated “entered” (*pareiserchomai*) literally means the law “came in alongside.” This suggests that grace pre-existed the Law, and was already at work. Grace was not a later addition to God’s plan; grace was a part of God’s plan from the very beginning. Don’t think that Law was given as *the* means of salvation from sin.

God dealt with Adam and Eve in grace; He dealt with the patriarchs in grace; and He dealt with the nation of Israel in grace. He had dealt with them according to the unconditional covenant of grace made with Abraham. The Law was not added for the purpose of displacing grace. Rather, the law was added to God’s dealings with man for another purpose. Here in v.20 we see why the law could never be a way of salvation, for:

B. The Law Only Increases Our Sin & Shows Our Utter Sinfulness – If the law was introduced as the means of saving us, then we might have expected Paul to say that the Law was introduced or added that sin might be restrained and diminished. But instead, Paul says in v.20, “Moreover the law entered that¹ the offense might abound (*pleonazo*).” Doesn’t that sound strange? Not if you examine this verse carefully. Adam’s trespass was disobedience to expressly revealed commandment. So when the law came in through Moses, there was henceforth a multiplication of the same kind of transgression, here called an “offense.” Until the law, sin was not manifested as transgression because there was no commandment of God to transgress against (cf. v.14). Sin was present both before and after the law, but now sin is shown to be rebellion against God.

Furthermore, the Law actually tends to stimulate sin due to man’s sin nature. It’s just human nature to want to do the very thing we are told not to do! Someone said, “There are three ways to get something done: do it yourself, hire someone to do it, or forbid the kids to do it.”² Whenever the law encounters the sin nature of man, it evokes its natural antagonism to God, and so stimulates it into disobedience. The entrance of the law immediately excited within the people a desire to break that law. Israel proved that immediately after receiving the Law.

You probably know that when the law prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages was enacted in the United States in 1920, it did not stop the sale & consumption of alcohol. In fact, some people who had never before touched liquor immediately began to drink! The problem here is not with the Law. The problem is with human nature.

So why is it that God gave the Law, if it actually increases sin? God knew that it would be very difficult to get man to abandon confidence in himself. And so the law was given, not as a means of producing righteousness, but as a means of showing us how sinful we really are. And this leads to another important truth about God’s purpose in giving the Law:

C. The Law Was Added That We Might Trust in God’s Grace - Paul points out that the Law does not frustrate, but furthers God’s purpose in preparing us for the work of Christ. As the awareness of our transgressions increases, even so there should be a greater sense of guilt and need of a Savior. Only when a sinner realizes his death in sin, can he be made alive in Christ. The law was given, not to save, but to drive men to Christ.

We can compare the law’s function to that of a mirror. You observe in a mirror that your face is dirty, but you do not rub the mirror upon your face. The mirror can show you that your face

¹ “That” may mean either “in order that” (expressing purpose) or “so that” (expressing result). Robertson, who interprets “that” as expressing result, understands Paul to mean that the giving of the law resulted in the increase of sin.

² Sparks, in *Bulletin Inserts of Pulpit Helps* [Illus.#C-978].

is dirty, but the mirror cannot wash your face. Anyone who bases salvation on keeping the Ten Commandments is as foolish as one who seeks to wash with a mirror.

One problem in our society today is that we are doing away with moral law. Many in our society no longer accept a standard of right and wrong. The ACLU wants to make everything legal, and nothing is declared wrong. Our schools are afraid to tell students that taking drugs or premarital sex is morally wrong. They are defining it only in terms of good and not so good “choices.” And so we have a generation of people who are growing up without a sense of right and wrong, and without a sense that they are lost & in need of Christ. The law serves a very useful and necessary purpose.

More than ever parents & churches need to teach moral law, and the laws of right and wrong. We need to teach the 10 Commandments, and the many other moral laws found in the Bible. You need to make sure your children come to Vacation Bible School. Enroll them & bring them to Sunday School. Get them involved in our AWANA program this Fall.

Of course the law was not added to provide the way of salvation. Paul has already concluded in Romans 3:20 that “no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” All that the law can do is demand positive perfection. A holy & righteous God could never ask less. God has only one passing mark. The passing mark is 100—perfection. The entrance of the law did not supply one iota of strength to keep the law, and it was soon manifest that the people of Israel were totally unable to keep it. Since man sinned, the law actually became a curse. Paul said in Gal. 3:10, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’” Since we will never achieve perfection in this life, the law cannot be the way of salvation.

We have seen that the Law cannot save us. It has an important role in leading us to the way of salvation, but it cannot set us free from the reign of sin and death. Now Paul pulls back the curtain to reveal the one ruler who is powerful enough to set us free from the grip of sin and death.

As we look to see the Ruler who can set us free, consider this: What is the opposite of Sin? Righteousness. Why, then, does he not say that “as sin reigned in death, even so righteousness might reign to eternal life”? Because it is not man, or anything in man, that can be the true victor over the reign of Sin. God Himself must come into the field, and only He is the foe that Sin dreads. That is to say, the only hope for a sin-tyrannized world is in the out throb of love from the great heart of God. The thing that will conquer a world’s wickedness is not human righteousness but the manifested love of God. And so that leads to the true Victor over Sin:

II. ONLY THE PREVAILING POWER OF GRACE CAN DELIVER US

Sin and Grace are both personified in this text. Both are said by Paul to “reign.” They stand face to face, and each recognizes the other as her enemy. The one has already established his dominion: “Sin reigned.” The other is fighting to establish hers: “even so Grace might reign.”

I suppose there are few of the keywords of the New Testament which have lost more of their radiance & meaning than that great word Grace. What does Paul mean by it? The word grace carries us into the heart of God. This Queen is nothing but the love of God radiating out to us forever, who deserve nothing because of our sinfulness. Yet, the love of God supplies the grace we need to be saved. By no other way can a sinful creature come to the Creator; and by no other means can a sinner stand before a holy God.

Now let us consider some wonderful truths about the grace of God. First of all:

A. God's Grace is Greater Than Our Sin – There is hope for deliverance from the tyranny of Sin, for Paul goes on to point out in the last of v.20, "But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." God's grace was more than adequate to deal with man's sins. Where there was guilt, there was more grace. Where there was sin, forgiveness was multiplied. When sin is most powerful, then grace is most mighty in deliverance. No matter how many times you have sinned, & no matter how badly you have sinned, God's grace can deliver you from sin, & bring forgiveness to your heart.

How is it that grace is greater than our sin? God never withholds grace because of sin. No dam erected by sin can stop the flow of God's grace. The multiplying of trespass is no problem with God. It only magnifies and demonstrates the super abounding riches of divine grace.

Adam had not gone very far from the scene of his rebellion before the grace of God sought him, called him by name, and pursued him in the obscurity of the grove where he was hiding. God did not withhold His grace because of Adam's sin. Instead, He made great promises of grace, announcing that the Messiah would come. Although man lost the garments of light, God intervened in grace and clothed the guilty pair with coats of skins.

In the time of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sin of humanity reached high tide when the Son of God was crucified, but out of sin's greatest evil the grace of God flowed which brings salvation.

Again, in the case of Saul of Tarsus, God did not withhold grace because of sin. Saul's sin abounded but the grace of God did much more abound. In 1 Timothy 1:14-15 he said, "And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant.... This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Though he later realized that he was the chief of sinners, God's grace reached a sinner like Saul of Tarsus, and gloriously saved him.

In the history of the Christian Church, one of the most outstanding objects of God's abounding grace was John Newton (1725-1807). He wrote the beloved song: "Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

I have told about John Newton before, but now I want to tell you "the rest of the story." He was an apprentice seaman. Wild and dissolute, he deserted from the British Navy and ran away to Africa in order "that I might sin my fill." He had the reputation of being able to curse for two hours without repeating himself. In Africa he fell in with a Portuguese slave-trader, and while this man was absent from his home, John Newton was treated like a dog by the chief woman of the trader's harem. Thin and emaciated, he decided to attempt an escape. He reached a spot on the coast where, with a signal fire, he attracted the attention of a passing ship. They took him on. Since he was a skilled navigator, he became first mate; but while the captain was ashore one day, John broke out the ship's rum and got the whole crew drunk. Upon his return, the captain struck him so violently that he fell overboard and would have drowned in his drunken condition, had not a sailor speared him in the thigh with a boathook, making a wound so great that ever afterwards John Newton could put his fist into the scar.

Weeks later, while the ship was returning to Britain, a great storm arose. Newton, who had been manning the pumps for days, cried out to God, and was wonderfully saved. John Newton became a pillar of the Church of England, chaplain to Parliament, and even preached before the King.

Where sin measurably increased, grace immeasurable increased. Where sin abounded (*pleonazo*), grace super abounded (*hyper-purissimeo*; the prefix *hyper* is like the Latin super).

Oh, dear sinner. Don't you worry about what you have done in the past. God's grace is more than sufficient to save your soul and change your life.

Paul tells us another important truth about grace:

B. God's Grace Reigns through Righteousness – Paul said in the last of v.21, “even so grace might reign through righteousness....” Grace has super abounded to the end that it might reign over our lives.

Notice that grace sought to establish her reign “through righteousness.” Even that great love of God, throbbing straight from His heart, cannot give eternal life as a mere matter of arbitrary will. There must be righteousness if there is to be life. Though grace brings forgiveness of sin, do not think that God has ever condoned any sin. For when we see Jesus dying, we not only see the love of God, but we also see the righteousness of God. We see that God hated sin with infinite hatred. The love of God freely provided the atoning sacrifice in the death of Jesus, that justice may be satisfied, & sinners might be saved. Because of this marriage of love and justice, God can now offer full and free salvation to every member of Adam's race. Thus grace is the freedom of God to forgive any sin with absolute righteousness because it has been paid for in full.

Friend, Grace is God's only remedy. Since He is perfect, He recognizes no good in a sinful creature, and so human merit is eliminated as a means of salvation. When the bulldozer of divine justice pushes human merit aside, the highway is open for the riches of God's grace to be conveyed to man.

So which one is ruling over your life, Sin or Grace? Can you say that Grace is ruling over your life if there is very little righteousness? God's grace is consistent with His righteousness.

Finally:

C. God's Grace Bestows Eternal Life – Again, Paul said in the last of v.21, “even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life....” The superabundance of grace is exemplified in the result which issues from this righteousness provided by grace, namely, “eternal life.” Just as sin's fruit is death, the fruit of righteousness is life. What is eternal life? This is, of course, in antitheses to death but it is life that death cannot invade and life that cannot be forfeited; it is life eternal.

Notice that His gift of eternal life is “through Jesus Christ our Lord.” He cannot allow the thought of grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life to be divorced for a moment from the mediation of “Jesus Christ our Lord.” In Him is all the grace of God gathered together. In Him is life eternal; therefore, if we desire to possess it we must possess Him. In Him is righteousness; therefore, if we desire to be liberated from sin, we must go to Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Eternal life is the gift that the love of God holds out to every one of us. Brother! Do you put out your hand to take the poisoned gift from the claw-like hand of that hideous Ruler called Sin? Or do you turn and take the gift of eternal life from the hand of the queenly Grace? If you have not done so, turn to Christ, and then you shall be delivered from the tyranny of death, and have eternal life.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), except pp.162-182; F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical*

Commentary on Romans (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. Since Dr. Felker's sermons are generally preached without notes, the "live" recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author's own words. To obtain an audio recording of this message, you may send \$2 for each CD ordered, plus \$2 shipping & handling for each order mailed in. Up to 2 messages come on each CD. Make checks payable to Swift Creek Baptist Church, P.O. Box 235, Colonial Heights, VA 23834. His email address is S+Felker+2@aol.com (remove + signs).