

Law and Grace

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon explains that the law reveals the depth of sin to drive sinners to despair of self-righteousness, so that they may embrace the superabounding grace offered through the gospel.

Scripture: Romans 5:20, Romans 1:20, Romans 7:9, 1 Corinthians 15:56

Topics: "Law and Gospel", "Sin and Grace", "Salvation by Grace"

Description

In this powerful expository sermon, C.H. Spurgeon carefully unpacks the relationship between the law and the gospel. He explains how the law reveals the true nature and extent of sin, making it impossible for anyone to be justified by works. Yet, in this revelation of sin's depth, grace is shown to be even more abundant and powerful, offering hope and salvation through Jesus Christ. Spurgeon encourages believers to understand the law's purpose and to rejoice in the superabounding grace that overcomes sin.

Transcript

"Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."—Romans 5:20.

There is no point upon which men make greater mistakes than upon the relation which exists between the law and the gospel. Some men put the law instead of the gospel: others put the gospel instead of the law; some modify the law and the gospel, and preach neither law nor gospel: and others entirely abrogate the law, by bringing in the gospel. Many there are who think that the law is the gospel, and who teach that men by good works of benevolence, honesty, righteousness, and sobriety, may be saved. Such men do err. On the other hand, many teach that the gospel is a law; that it has certain commands in it, by obedience to which, men are meritoriously saved; such men err from the truth, and understand it not. A certain class maintain that the law and the gospel are mixed, and that partly by observance of the law, and partly by God's grace, men are saved. These men understand not the truth, and are false teachers. This morning I shall attempt—God helping me to show you what is the design of the law, and then what is the end of the gospel. The coming of the law is explained in regard to its objects: "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound." Then comes the mission of the gospel: "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

I shall consider this text in two senses this morning. First, as it respects the world at large and the entrance of the law into it; and then afterwards, as respecting the heart of the convinced sinner, and the entrance of the law into the conscience.

The object of God in sending the law into the world was “that the offence might abound.” But then comes the gospel, for “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” First, then, in reference to the entire world, God sent the law into the world “that the offence might abound.” There was sin in the world long before God sent the law. God gave his law that the offence might seem to be an offence; ay, and that the offence might abound exceedingly more than it could have done without its coming. There was sin long before Sinai smoked; long ere the mountain trembled beneath the weight of Deity, and the dread trumpet sounded exceeding loud and long, there had been transgression. And where that law has never been heard, in heathen countries where that word has never gone forth, yet there is sin,—because, though men cannot sin against the law which they have never seen, yet they can all rebel against the light of nature, against the dictates of conscience, and against that traditional remembrance of right and wrong, which has followed mankind from the place where God created them. All men, in every land, have consciences, and therefore all men can sin. The ignorant Hottentot, who has never heard anything of a God, has just so much of the light of nature, that in the things that are outwardly good or bad he will discern the difference; and though he foolishly bows down to stocks and stones, he has a judgment which, if he used it, would teach him better. If he chose to use his talents, he might know there is a God; for the Apostle, when speaking of men who have only the light of nature, plainly declares that “the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” Romans 1:20. Without a divine revelation men can sin, and sin exceedingly—conscience, nature, tradition, and reason, being each of them, sufficient to condemn them for their violated commandments. The law makes no one a sinner; all men are such in Adam, and were so practically before its introduction. It entered that “the offence might abound.” Now this seems a very terrible thought at first sight, and many ministers would have shirked this text altogether. But when I find a verse I do not understand, I usually think it is a text I should study; and I try to seek it out before my heavenly Father, and then when he has opened it to my soul, I reckon it my duty to communicate it to you, with the holy aid of the Spirit. “The law entered that the offence might abound.” I will attempt to show you how the law makes offenses “abound.”

Methinks I hear some say, “How unwise it must have been that a law should come to make these things abound!” Does it not, at first sight, seem very harsh that the great author of the world should give us a law which will not justify, but indirectly cause our condemnation to be greater? Does it not seem to be a thing which a gracious God would not reveal, but would have withheld? But, know ye, “that the foolishness of God is wiser than men;” and understand ye that there is a gracious purpose even here. Natural men dream that by a strict performance of duty they shall obtain favor, but God saith thus: “I will show them their folly by proclaiming a law so high that they will despair of attaining unto it. They think that works will be sufficient to save them. They think falsely, and they will be ruined by their mistake. I will send them a law so terrible in its censures, so unflinching in its demands, that they cannot possibly obey it, and they will be driven even to desperation, and come and accept my mercy through Jesus Christ. They cannot be saved by the law—not by the law of nature. As it is, they have sinned against it. But yet, I know, they have foolishly hoped to keep my law, and think by works of the law they may be justified; whereas I have said, ‘By the works of the law no flesh living can be justified;’ therefore I will write a law—it shall be a black and heavy one—a burden which they cannot carry; and then they will turn away and say, ‘I will not attempt to perform it; I will ask my Saviour to bear it for me.’” Imagine a case—Some young men are about to go to sea, where I foresee they will meet with a storm. Suppose you put me in a position where I may cause a tempest before the other shall arise. Well, by the time the natural storm comes on, those young men will be a long way out at sea, and they will be wrecked and ruined before they can put back and be safe. But what do I? Why, when they are just at the mouth of the river, I send a storm, putting them in the greatest

danger, and precipitating them ashore, so that they are saved. Thus did God. He sends a law which shows them the roughness of the journey. The tempest of law compels them to put back to the harbour of free grace, and saves them from a most terrible destruction, which would otherwise overwhelm them. The law never came to save men. It never was its intention at all. It came on purpose to make the evidence complete that salvation by works is impossible, and thus to drive the elect of God to rely wholly on the finished salvation of the gospel. Now, just to illustrate my meaning, let me describe it by one more figure. You all remember those high mountains called the Alps. Well, it would be a great mercy if those Alps were a little higher. It would have been, at all events, for Napoleon's soldiers when he led his large army over, and caused thousands to perish in crossing. Now, if it could have been possible to pile another Alps on their summit, and make them higher than the Himalaya, would not the increased difficulty have deterred him from his enterprise, and so have averted the destruction of thousands? Napoleon demanded, "Is it possible?" "Barely possible," was the reply. "Avancez," cried Buonaparte; and the host were soon toiling up the mountain side. Now, by the light of nature, it does seem possible for us to go over this mountain of works, but all men would have perished in the attempt, the path even of this lower hill being too narrow for mortal footsteps. God, therefore, puts another law, like a mountain, on the top; and now the sinner says, "I cannot climb over that. It is a task beyond Herculean might. I see before me a narrow pass, called the pass of Jesus Christ's mercy—the pass of the cross—methinks I will wend my way thither." But if it had not been that the mountain was too high for him, he would have gone climbing up, and climbing up, until he sank into some chasm, or was lost under some mighty avalanche, or in some other way perished eternally. But the law comes that the whole world might see the impossibility of being saved by works.

Let us turn to the more pleasing part of the subject—the superabundance of grace. Having bewailed the devastations and injurious deeds of sin, it delights our hearts to be assured that "grace did much more abound."

What though those who have been deluded by superstition, and destroyed by lust, must be counted by thousands—grace has still the pre-eminence. Saul has slain his thousands, but David his ten-thousands. We admit that the number of the damned will be immense, but we do think that the two states of infancy and millennial glory will furnish so great a reserve of saints that Christ shall win the day. The procession of the lost may be long; there must be thousands, and thousands, and thousands, of those who have perished, but the greater procession of the King of kings shall be composed of larger hosts than even these. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The trophies of free grace will be far more than the trophies of sin.

Yet again. Grace doth "much more abound,"—because a time shall come when the world shall be all full of grace; whereas there has never been a period in this world's history when it was wholly given to sin. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, there was still a display of grace in the world; for in the garden at the close of the day, God said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel;" and since that first transgression, there has never been a moment when grace has entirely lost its footing in the earth. God has always had his servants on earth; at times they have been hidden by fifties in the caves, but they have never been utterly cut off. Grace might be low; the stream might be very shallow, but it has never been wholly dry. There has always been a salt of grace in the world to counteract the power of sin. The clouds have never been so universal as to hide the day. But the time is fast approaching when grace shall extend all over our poor world and be universal. According to the Bible testimony, we look for the great day when the dark cloud which has swathed this world in darkness shall be removed, and it shall shine once more like all its sister

planets. It hath been for many a long year clouded and veiled by sin and corruption; but the last fire shall consume its rags and sackcloth. After that fire, the world in righteousness shall shine. The huge molten mass now slumbering in the bowels of our common mother shall furnish the means of purity. Palaces, and crowns, and peoples, and empires, are all to be melted down; and after like a plague-house, the present creation has been burned up entirely, God will breathe upon the heated mass, and it will cool down again. He will smile on it as he did when he first created it, and the rivers will run down the new-made hills, the oceans will float in new-made channels; and the world will be again the abode of the righteous for ever and for ever. This fallen world will be restored to its orbit; that gem which was lost from the sceptre of God shall be set again, yea, he shall wear it as a signet about his arm. Christ died for the world; and what he died for, he will have. He died for the whole world, and the whole world he will have, when he has purified it and cleansed it and fitted it for himself. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound;" for grace shall be universal, whereas sin never was.

One thought more. Hath the world lost its possessions by sin? It has gained far more by grace. True, we have been expelled a garden of delights, where peace, love, and happiness found a glorious habitation. True, Eden is not ours, with its luscious fruits, its blissful bowers, and its rivers flowing o'er sands of gold, but we have through Jesus a fairer habitation. He hath made us sit together in heavenly places—the plains of heaven exceed the fields of paradise in the ever-new delights which they afford, while the tree of life, and the river from the throne render the inhabitants of the celestial regions more than emparadised. Did we lose natural life and subject ourselves to painful death by sin? Has not grace revealed an immortality for the sake of which we are too glad to die? Life lost in Adam is more restored in Christ. We admit that our original robes were rent in sunder by Adam, but Jesus has clothed us with a divine righteousness, far exceeding in value even the spotless robes of created innocence. We mourn our low and miserable condition, through sin, but we will rejoice at the thought, that we are now more secure than before we fell, and are brought into closer alliance with Jesus than our standing could have procured us. O Jesus! thou hast won us an inheritance more wide than our sin has ever lavished. Thy grace has overtopped our sins. "Grace doth much more abound."

We have to deal carefully when we come to deal with internal things; it is not easy to talk about this little thing, the heart. When we begin to meddle with the law of their soul, many become indignant, but we do not fear their wrath. We are going to attack the hidden man this morning. The law entered their hearts that sin might abound, "but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

John Bunyan shall explain my meaning by an extract from his famous allegory: "Then the Interpreter took Christian by the hand and led him into a very large parlour that was full of dust, because never swept; in which after he had reviewed it a little while, the Interpreter called for a man to sweep. Now, when he began to sweep, the dust became so abundantly to fly about, that Christian had almost therewith been choked. Then said Interpreter to a damsel that stood by, 'Bring hither water, and sprinkle the room'; the which when she had done, it was swept and cleansed with pleasure. Then said Christian, 'What means this?' The Interpreter answered, 'This parlour is the heart of a man that was never sanctified by the sweet grace of the gospel. The dust is his original sin and inward corruptions that have defiled the whole man. He that began to sweep, at first, is the law; but she that brought the water and did sprinkle it, is the gospel. Now, whereas thou sawest that as soon as the first began to sweep, the dust did so fly about, that the room could not by him be cleansed, but that thou wast almost choked therewith; this is to show thee, that the law, instead of cleansing the heart (by its working) from sin, doth revive, Romans 7:9, put strength into, 1 Corinthians 15:56, and increase it in the soul, Romans 5:20, even as it doth discover and forbid it, for that

doth not give power to subdue. Again, as thou sawest the damsel sprinkle the room with water, upon which it was cleansed with pleasure; this is to show thee, that when the gospel comes in the sweet and precious influences thereof to the heart, then, I say, even as thou sawest the damsel lay the dust by sprinkling the floor with water, so is sin vanquished and subdued, and the soul made clean, through the faith of it, and consequently fit for the King of glory to inhabit.”

The heart is like a dark cellar, full of lizards, cockroaches, beetles, and all kinds of reptiles and insects, which in the dark we see not, but the law takes down the shutters and lets in the light, and so we see the evil. Thus sin becoming apparent by the law, it is written the law makes the offence to abound.

The law cuts into the core of the evil, it reveals the seat of the malady, and informs us that the leprosy lies deep within. Oh! how the man abhors himself when he sees all his rivers of water turned into blood, and loathsomeness creeping over all his being. He learns that sin is no flesh wound, but a stab in the heart; he discovers that the poison has impregnated his veins, lies in his very marrow, and hath its fountain in his inmost heart. Now he loathes himself, and would fain be healed. Actual sin seems not half so terrible as in-bred sin, and at the thought of what he is, he turns pale, and gives up salvation by works as an impossibility.

When Moses smites the sinner he bruises and mangles him with the first blow, but at a second or a third, he falls down as one dead. I myself have been in such a condition that if heaven could have been purchased by a single prayer I should have been damned, for I could no more pray than I could fly. Moreover, when we are in the grave which the law has dugged for us, we feel as if we did not feel, and we grieve because we cannot grieve. The dread mountain lies upon us which renders it impossible to stir hand or foot, and when we would cry for help our voice refuses to obey us. In vain the minister cries, “Repent,” Our hard heart will not melt; in vain he exhorts us to believe; that faith of which he speaks seems to be as much beyond our capacity as the creation of the universe. Ruin is now become ruin indeed. The thundering sentence is in our ears, “CONDEMNED ALREADY,” another cry follows it, “DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SINS,” and a third, more awful and terrible, mingles its horrible warning, “The wrath to come—the wrath to come.” In the opinion of the sinner he is now cast out as a corrupt carcass, he expects each moment to be tormented by the worm that never dies and to lift up his eyes in hell. Now is mercy’s moment, and we turn the subject from condemning law to abounding grace.

Listen, O heavy laden, condemned sinner, while in my Master’s name, I publish superabounding grace. Grace excels sin in its measure and efficacy. Though your sins are many, mercy hath many pardons. Though they excel the stars, the sands, the drops of dew in their number, one act of remission can cancel all. Your iniquity, though a mountain, shall be cast into the midst of the sea. Your blackness shall be washed out by the cleansing flood of your Redeemer’s gore. Mark! I said YOUR sins, and I meant to say so, for if you are now a law-condemned sinner, I know you to be a vessel of mercy by that very sign. Oh, hellish sinners, abandoned profligates, off-casts of society, outcasts from the company of sinners themselves, if ye acknowledge your iniquity, here is mercy, broad, ample, free, immense, INFINITE. Remember this O sinner,—

“If all the sins that men have done,

In will, in word, in thoughts, in deed,

Since words were made, or time began,

Were laid on one poor sinner's head.

The stream of Jesus' precious blood

Applied, removes the dreadful load."

Yet again, grace excelleth sin in another thing. Sin shows us its parent, and tells us our heart is the father of it, but grace surpasseth sin there, and shows the Author of grace—the King of kings. The law traces sin up to our heart; grace traces its own origin to God, and

"In his sacred breast I see

Eternal thoughts of love to me."

O Christian, what a blessed thing grace is, for its source is in the everlasting mountains. Sinner, if you are the vilest in the world, if God forgives you this morning, you will be able to trace your pedigree to him, for you will become one of the sons of God, and have him always for your Father. Methinks I see you a wretched criminal at the bar, and I hear mercy cry, "Discharge him!" He is pallid, halt, sick, maimed—heal him. He is of a vile race—lo, I will adopt him into my family. Sinner! God taketh thee for his son. What, though thou art poor, God says, "I will take thee to be mine for ever. Thou shalt be my heir. There is thy fair brother. In ties of blood he is one with thee—Jesus is thy actual brother!" Yet how came this change? Oh! is not that an act of mercy? "Grace did much more abound."

"Grace hath put me in the number

Of the Saviour's family."

Grace outdoes sin, for it lifts us higher than the place from which we fell.

And again, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound"; because the sentence of the law may be reversed, but that of grace never can. I stand here and feel condemned, yet, perhaps, I have a hope that I may be acquitted. There is a dying hope of acquittal still left. But when we are justified, there is no fear of condemnation. I cannot be condemned if I am once justified; fully absolved I am by grace. I defy Satan to lay hands on me, if I am a justified man. The state of justification is an unvariable one, and is indissolubly united to glory. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Oh! poor condemned sinner, doth not this charm thee, and make thee in love with free grace? And all this is YOURS. Your crimes, if once blotted out, shall never be laid to your charge again. The justification of the gospel is no Arminian sham, which may be reversed if you should in future turn aside. No; the debt once paid, cannot be demanded twice—the punishment, once endured, cannot again be inflicted. Saved, saved, saved, entirely saved by divine grace, you may walk without fear the wide world over.

And yet, once more. Just as sin makes us sick, and grievous, and sad, so does grace make us far more joyful and free. Sin causeth one to go about with an aching heart, till he seems as if the world would

swallow him, and mountains hang above ready to drop upon him. This is the effect of the law. The law makes us sad; the law makes us miserable. But, poor sinner, grace removeth the evil effects of sin upon your spirit, if thou dost believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, thou shalt go out of this place with a sparkling eye and a light heart. Ah! well do I remember the morning when I stepped into a little place of worship, as miserable almost as hell could make me—being ruined and lost. I had often been at chapels where they spoke of the law, but I heard not the gospel. I sat down the pew a chained and imprisoned sinner; the Word of God came, and I went out free. Though I went in miserable as hell, I went out elated and joyful. I sat there black; I went away whiter than driven snow. God had said, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be whiter than snow.” Why not this be thy lot, my brother, if thou feelest thyself a sinner now? It is all he asks of thee, to feel thy need of him, this thou hast, and now the blood of Jesus lies before thee. “The law has entered that sin might abound.” Thou art forgiven, only believe it; elect, only believe it; ‘tis the truth that thou are saved.

And now, lastly, poor sinner, has sin made thee unfit for heaven? Grace shall render thee a fit companion for seraphs and the just made perfect. Thou who art to-day lost and destroyed by sin, shalt one day find thyself with a crown upon thy head, and a golden harp in thine hand, exalted to the throne of the Most High. Think, O drunkard, if thou repentest, there is a crown laid up for thee in heaven. Ye guiltiest, most lost and depraved, are ye condemned in your conscience by the law? Then I invite you, in my Master’s name, to accept pardon through his blood. He suffered in your stead, he has atoned for your guilt and you are acquitted. Thou art an object of his eternal affection, the law is but a schoolmaster, to bring thee to Christ. Cast thyself on him. Fall into the arms of saving grace. No works are required, no fitness, no righteousness, no doings. Ye are complete in him who said, “It is finished.”

“Ye debtors whom he gives to know

That you ten thousand talents owe,

When humble at his feet you fall,

Your gracious God forgives them all.

“Slaves, that have borne the heavy chain

Of sin, and hell’s tyrannic reign,

To liberty assert your claim,

And urge the great Redeemer’s name.

“The rich inheritance of heaven,

Your joy, your boast, is freely giv’n;

Fair Salem your arrival waits,

With golden streets, and pearly gates.

“Her blest inhabitants no more

Bondage and poverty implore!

No debt, but love immensely great;

Their joy still rises with the debt."

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