

Romans 5:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

Analysis

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound—the νόμος (nomos, 'law') παρεισῆλθεν (pareisēlthen, 'came in alongside/entered additionally'), a subordinate clause suggesting law's supplementary purpose. The ἵνα (hina, 'in order that') clause states God's purpose: that τὸ παράπτωμα πλεονάσῃ (to paraptōma pleonasē, 'the trespass might increase/abound'). This doesn't mean law causes sin but that it reveals sin's true character and extent, transforming vague wrongdoing into explicit transgression against known divine commands (7:7-13).

But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (οὗ δὲ ἐπλεόνασεν ἡ ἁμαρτία, ὑπερπερίσσευσεν ἡ χάρις)—the triumphant declaration: grace ὑπερπερισσεύω (hyperperisseuō, 'super-abound/overflow beyond measure'). The intensified compound verb stresses grace's overwhelming victory. Sin's increase under law serves to magnify grace's triumph—where sin reaches maximum expression, grace surpasses it infinitely. This isn't license (6:1-2) but assurance that no sin exhausts God's grace.

Historical Context

This verse addresses why God gave law if it increases transgression. Paul's answer: law serves grace by fully exposing sin's magnitude, driving sinners to despair of self-righteousness and cast themselves on Christ alone. Luther's spiritual breakthrough came from understanding that law's purpose is to slay self-

trust and reveal sin's depth, making grace precious. The law is 'pedagogue unto Christ' (Galatians 3:24), not the savior but the revealer of need for the Savior.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the law making sin 'abound' serve grace—isn't more sin worse?
2. What sins in your life does God's law expose that you might otherwise ignore or minimize?
3. How does grace 'super-abounding' over sin protect against both legalism (thinking sin disqualifies you) and license (thinking sin doesn't matter)?

Interlinear Text

νόμος	δὲ	παρεισῆλθεν	ἵνα	ἐπλεόνασεν	τὸ	παράπτωμα·
the law	But	entered	that	abounded	G3588	the offence
G3551	G1161	G3922	G2443	G4121		G3900
οὗ	δὲ	ἐπλεόνασεν	ἡ	ἁμαρτία	ὑπερεπερίσσευσεν	ἡ
where	But	abounded	G3588	sin	did much more abound	G3588
G3757	G1161	G4121		G266	G5248	
χάρις						
grace						
G5485						

Additional Cross-References

Romans 6:1 (Grace): What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

Psalms 25:11 (Sin): For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.

Romans 6:14 (Grace): For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Romans 4:15 (Word): Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

Luke 7:47 (Sin): Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

John 10:10 (Parallel theme): The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

Isaiah 1:18 (Sin): Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Matthew 9:13 (Grace): But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

John 15:22 (Sin): If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.

Ezekiel 16:52 (Sin): Thou also, which hast judged thy sisters, bear thine own shame for thy sins that thou hast committed more abominable than they: they are more righteous than thou: yea, be thou confounded also, and bear thy shame, in that thou hast justified thy sisters.