

Reading: Galatians 3:1-29

Looking at Romans 5:20a

Theme: Maximizing and magnifying the Trespass.

When Sian has been doing cross-stitching, she will sometimes say “*It is taking shape!*” I’m asked if I can see what it is yet and as I look at it, I’m not sure which side I’m looking at - the front or the back or if it’s upside down! When she adds the black outline to things, then even I can make sense of it and see what it is!

Scientists have shown that even the cleanest bed has many, many house dust mites in it and to see a picture of one magnified many times (*they are about the size of a grain of salt*) makes you want to sleep anywhere but in your own bed! I have read a report of the analysis of the seats of London Underground carriages, which you don’t want to know, but stand if at all possible...!

Paul has been writing of glorious things in the passage Romans 5:12-21 We have seen some of these things - what we are and have in Adam compared and contrasted to what we are and have in Christ. Paul shows the wonder, the superiority of grace and being justified by faith. Have we noticed that throughout the whole passage there is no mention of what we can do, what we can achieve? In fact, it is stressed - by its absence - that we bring, contribute, add nothing to our salvation, our justification by what we feel, try to do or actually do. This must have been puzzling to pagans who were believers and even to Jews who were believers - as all stressed the importance of doing things. To tie up any loose ends, to say in effect about the Law “*Can you see what it is yet?*” Paul adds v20-21 to get things in focus, to give it shape. I suppose Paul is answering an unsaid question here, that he put in Galatians 3:19 “*What then was the purpose of the Law?*”

That is basically the question I want us to look at, so we can see the purpose of the Law in the context of being justified by faith.

All I'm going to do its work through the first sentence of v20 using 4 points, the 4th being larger than the others:

1. The Scope of The Law.

Paul had mentioned the Law back in v13 - sin was in the world before the Law was given. Here Paul picks up on the Law mentioned earlier and is going to show its purpose. Paul has argued that mankind is condemned in Adam's sin and all were and are condemned in him even before the Law was given. So why was the Law given? - is a question some ask. It did not save, it did not in that sense condemn, so what was its purpose? Paul was not content to leave it as an unanswered question, a stumbling block to people and he goes on to try to answer it.

What is meant here by the term "the Law"? Charles Hodge says *"The Law stands here for the whole of the OT economy, including the clear revelation of the moral Law, and all the institutions connected with the former dispensation."* The term "Law" includes the 10 Commandments (*the moral law*), all the ceremonial laws and rituals attached to them. We may feel *"Why do we bother looking at them?"* This was important for the early Christians to know and Paul also wrote on the same subject in Galatians 3. We may not be pressurised by Judaizers today in the same way as they were, but we will have those who will stress and say *"You need to be saved by believing and then doing or not doing..."* Descendants of the Pharisees are still around and have lists of dos and don'ts - even spiritual things can be added to the list as having to be done otherwise you can't really be a Christian! Going on we see:

2. The Law Came Alongside.

The Law was *"added"* or the Law *"entered"*. Some say it was added, entered between the time of Adam and the time of Christ.

Yes, that is true, but it is a bit anaemic and does not really catch the force of the original word or the context it is in. Paul had written in v12 “*sin entered*”, here in v20 “*the Law entered*” (in some versions), but he uses 2 slightly different yet similar words. Here in v20 the same word as in v12 is used with a prefix, a small word added to its start (εισερχομαι [v12], παρεισερχομαι [v20]) which moves the emphasis from just entering, to entering alongside of, besides, in addition to. The Law entered by the side of, in addition to what? Commentators differ in their answer to this - some say in addition to the command Adam disobeyed and emphasise additional commands and requirements were made known.

Yet Paul has not been speaking of the commands, but the sin, the disobedience, the trespass of Adam and our guilt in union with him. This leads other commentators to say that the Law entered in alongside, in addition to this original sin and the condemnation it brought. Paul is not emphasising the Law as important in salvation, as crucial to be saved, but says this was an additional thing that came in and alongside Adam’s original sin.

Yes, it has a function, as we will see, but is not the be all and end of our thoughts of God. It is not essential to salvation either. In fact, its introduction brought a curse, the curse of the Law and we need to be saved from it too. Moving on we see further:

3. The All-Embracing Blunder.

Paul writes “*that the trespass, offence may increase*”. This word trespass, offence is best translated as trespass and it means “*a false step, a blunder, a fall*”. Here it refers to Adam’s first sin and includes, encompasses everything that has arisen from out of his stepping out of line, his deviating from the truth. It speaks of his sin, but also includes and encompasses all our sins, all we have

done, said and thought wrong, every time we fallen into sin and left the right path. No matter how small a deviation from the true it has been, they are all trespasses.

At times, we feel our sins, wrong words, thoughts, desires and actions are so serious, but when the Law was given it did something to Adam and our trespasses as the Law truly exposed the seriousness of them. We see the Law was added with purpose of truly exposing the all-embracing blunder and we see:

4. The Magnifying Maximising Analysing Volumizer.

I guess I'd better explain that strange heading! Remember I mentioned the house dust mites, small, unseen insignificant creatures, but when they are magnified, they look like something out of a nightmare or a horror movie. The London Underground seats are cleaned daily (*allegedly*), but the things found on and in them on closer examination are disgusting and would turn our stomachs. The Law came in and magnified and exposed our sins for what they are. The Law showed us the disgusting nature of our own trespasses, as well as Adam's trespass.

Let's deal with something here that people get wrong concerning the Law. The Law was never given so that people could have the opportunity to save themselves by obeying it! It is not a scheme for DIY salvation or of getting righteous before God. Sadly, some people feel they can be saved by doing good, by obedience - I pray there is no one here like that. The Law of God was never designed to do that. Yes, it shows us what God expects, how God wants all mankind to live even as Christians, but it never promises, holds out any encouragement that obedience would lead to earning salvation!

Paul categorically says here that the Law entered in, was added so that the offence might abound, increase, be magnified. This is not saying God made us sin the worse or more. Neither is it saying God is the author of sin. What Paul says is that sin increased and commentators bring out a number of ways in which the Law increased sin, caused sin to super abound or increase. The idea of magnifying, maximising, analysing and volumizing is a good way to picture this, as it not only shows sin in detail, but analyses and exposes such. We will briefly look at 3 ways the Law increases sin - these are not the only works of the Law. The Law:

A. Increases our knowledge of sin. Paul wrote in 3:2 through the Law we become conscious of sin. Then in 7:7 says that he would not have known what sin was except through the Law. God gives us the standard; the measure of what sin is and shows us what sin is like. The Law defines what sin is. We as mankind, were ignorant of sin, of the requirements of God, then the Law came, defined it, made it known. There are many substances I remember handling and using at A-level chemistry which are now classified as dangerous, even hazardous! They didn't suddenly become hazardous when defined or classified - they always were, but now we are aware of such and the many dangers they bring. The Law came in, defined, delineated sin as sin, as a trespass. Doing the action was sin against God, but in being given in the Law, now it was defined, identified as wrong and therefore a trespass. The Law identified, defined and pinpointed these actions as sin and as a trespass. We say the ignorance of the law is no defence, but knowing the law makes us the more guilty *e.g. police inspector who led drink-drive campaign being over the limit!*

As such, the real nature of sin and its dark depths are known. We all know that we are not perfect, but now the Law says “*Yes, but see how horrible your sin really is!*” The Law shows the true

extent of the disgusting pollution and dirtiness of sin. It, as well as doing this, shows us the power and grip of sin in our lives. Many people realise they do wrong and yet they keep on doing it. Sin is not an addiction, sin is a possessing power that has got us in its grip and it controls, dominates, motivates our human nature - we are infected with sin in every part of our being i.e. total depravity. Total depravity does not mean we are as bad as we could be, but total depravity refers to the fact that we are totally affected by sin in every aspect of our lives - physically, emotionally, intellectually, motivationally, spiritually and in our desires.

Sadly, in our fallen nature, we do not know that because our innermost beings are deceitful and have been deceived - Jeremiah 17:9 tells us *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”* Paul says in 7:11 *“For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.”*

The Law was meant to show us our sin and expose it, but the sinfulness of sin deceives us and the Law, as it was given, shows us that we are deceived by sin. Yet the Law goes further:

B. The Law Increases Our Conviction of and in Sin. The Law does not just say *“Look this is what sin is about”*, but it comes and says that **we** do wrong and **we** are guilty! We always have to teach a child to do right as they are unaware of the wrong - not to play with fire, not to put fingers in a socket, as well as to speak the truth and not to tell lies etc. The Law not only says that we do wrong, but also tells us we are guilty and at times makes us aware of our guilt to different intensities. Sin is not necessarily something that makes us feel sorry, else many people will feel they are innocent, but it primarily causes us to see our offence against God, we are guilty before Him whether we feel it or not. David in his adultery

with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, when he confessed his sin (*a long time after those events*) said that his sin was against God and against God only did he sin. Realise our sin is primarily against God and offends Him.

When God's Law begins to work upon us - as the Holy Spirit applies it to our lives - we begin to feel guilt and are burdened with a sense of conviction. Often the true preaching of the gospel is not good news as it presents people with an offended God. We are able to use God's Law to drive home the need of people before God. Their need is not to feel good about themselves, or to be happy or contented, not even to be fulfilled, but to have peace with the God they have offended. It may be that the preaching of the gospel will do a work by the Law - to bring people to a conviction of sin as they realise their need of a Saviour. The Law in this way is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ as our Saviour. Pray for that work to go on in people coming to the church and who we witness to. Now we see finally that:

C. The Law Incites Us to Sin. Such is sin's perverseness and deception that even as God's Law says "*No, this is wrong!*" So, our sinful natures want to do it and even to do it the more! Paul shows us this from his personal experience in 7:7-11.

The Law magnifies, identifies and defines sin. The Law shows us the effect it has on us and even stirs up our deceived hearts to do that which it lays bare before us. As the Law is preached and then applied by the Holy Spirit, some have felt helpless and hopeless, even felt that hell was too good for them! Yet then another message came through, above the dismal sight of their sin which was magnified and that was the wonder of God's grace. They saw that even though sin increased, was magnified, they also saw

God's grace increase, abound and be magnified even more - that is our great theme for next week!

If God is so loving and good as to give us views of our own sin and guilt, then we are not to despise any of those gracious views of our sin and guilt. A sense of these under God is given to magnify even more His amazing offer of grace to such sinners as you and me. An increased awareness of our own sin means we'll never think we could ever save ourselves by our own doing, ability or strength. This should increase our thankfulness to our God and Saviour as we will know we have been forgiven much and so love much. It will keep us from shallow views of sin, cause us to keep away from and to flee from sin and avoid it like the plague it is.

We can thank God that as sin increased, grace increased all the more and there is God's grace abounding for us all, even to the chief of sinners.