

## Grace Superabounding over the Aboundings of Sin

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"But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 5:20, 21

The origin of evil has puzzled and baffled the acutest minds that ever existed; and no doubt it will continue to perplex and baffle the mind of man as long as the world shall endure. *How* evil in the first instance originated, and *why* God permitted it to arise in his fair creation, are mysteries unfathomable to man's finite understanding. It is of no use, therefore, for those who fear God to attempt to dive into these unfathomable mysteries, but to leave them as they stand, insoluble by creature intellect. It is sufficient for those that fear God, to know these three things respecting evil.— *First*, that "sin hath entered into the world;" and that we, as connected with our first parents, are involved in it. *Secondly*, that for those who spiritually know and experimentally groan under sin, as opened up in their consciences by the Spirit of God, there is a remedy, an all-sufficient remedy, in the mediation of God's dear Son. And *thirdly*, that all evil will be eventually overruled for the good of the church, and for Jehovah's eternal glory.

In the latter part of this chapter, the Apostle has drawn a parallel betwixt our standing in our first covenant head, and our standing in our second covenant head; and he shows the miseries that result from the one, and the blessings that flow from the other. But in exhibiting this parallel, and in drawing out this comparison, he shows how much more the benefits

that spring from our union with our second covenant head overtop and surpass the miseries that flow from our union with our first covenant head; and, in fact, sums up the whole comparison in the words of the text, "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

The parallel, at which I have hinted, is summed up then in the text; and we find, that there are mentioned in it *three* leading points as to our connection with our first covenant head, and *three* corresponding leading points as to our connection with our second covenant head; and that these are set over against each other. *The abounding of sin—the reign of sin—and death*, as the consequence of that reign, are the three leading miseries which result from our union with our first covenant head. *The superaboundings of grace over sin—the reign of grace—and the eventual triumphs of grace in bringing its subjects unto eternal life*, are the three leading mercies on the other side, which we derive from our connection with our second covenant head.

The subject then divides itself into two leading branches.

I.—What we derive, in the way of misery, from our union with Adam.

II.—What we derive, in the way of mercy, from our union with Christ.

We will look, with God's blessing, at these two branches in their order.

I.—The first misery, which our connection with Adam has entailed upon us, is, *The reign of sin*; for though it is not put

down in the text as the first point, yet I find it more convenient to treat of it before the two others.

1. *The reign of sin.* Sin is represented by this expression as a mighty Conqueror, triumphing over all men, and prostrating the whole human race under his universal dominion. And do we not find wherever we go that such is the case? Sin, like a mighty conqueror, exercises sovereign authority over all men, from the palace to the cottage, from the throne to the dunghill. It not only *exists*, but it *reigns* in the mind of man; and exercises supreme authority over their thoughts, words, and ways, compelling them to yield implicit submission to all its dictates.

But when do we come experimentally to know this painful truth? We come to know it, for the first time, when we come to know what sin is. And when do we come to know what sin is? We never know the real nature of sin, until it is opened up in our conscience by the Spirit of God. In the light of a broken law, and in the manifestation of God's holiness to the conscience, we learn for the first time that we are sinners before him. Now, when the Lord teaches a man that he is a sinner, he implants in him a nature which is holy as God is holy, and pure as God is pure; and therefore we are said (2 Peter 1:4) to be "partakers of the divine nature," that is, of that which is communicable of the divine nature. Now, no sooner is this "divine nature" implanted in a man's soul, than it draws forth the tyranny of sin. As long as the man was dead in sin, there was no opposition to this mighty Tyrant: all his commands were implicitly obeyed, and no resistance was offered to his will; he eagerly fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and whatever sin bade him do, that he did gladly and cheerfully. But no sooner is the fear of God planted in the soul, a sense of sin felt in the conscience, and a manifestation of God's holiness brought with divine light

and life into the heart, than the vessel of mercy begins to resist and struggle, and tries to withdraw his neck out of the yoke, which this arbitrary tyrant had fastened on him. But just in the same way as naturally, when subjects begin to rebel, the oppressor begins to multiply his terrors, and shew forth his power; so no sooner do we begin, in the fear of God, and under the workings of God's Spirit, to withdraw our necks out of this yoke, than sin, like a mighty tyrant, begins to shew forth all his hideous strength. We may raise about us what bulwarks we please; entrench ourselves with vows, promises, and resolutions; but sin, like a mighty tyrant, while the soul is under the law, batters down all its defences: for the law gives strength unto sin, according to the Apostle's words, "the strength of sin is the law." So that the more the soul tries, while under the law, to resist sin and oppose it, the more does sin exercise its tyrannical authority to beat and batter down every bulwark and every opposition, with which we may try to resist it. Thus, then, commences a conflict, in which we are sure to be worsted, for it is God's purpose that we should be overthrown; it is his design that sin should prevail over us, and kill us outright; in order that when we are slaughtered outright by this tyrant sin, the Lord may pick us up by sovereign grace, and show us that as sin hath reigned over us, even so must grace reign. The Apostle therefore adds, "*unto death,*" which is the second fruit of our union with Adam.

2. Sin is represented by this expression, not merely as a mighty monarch, who holds his subjects in implicit submission, but as carrying a sword, whereby he executes vengeance upon all rebels. He "reigns unto death." Sin reigns in the world unto death. Whence comes temporal death, but through sin? Whence spiritual death, but through sin? And whence eternal death, but through sin? Sin, therefore, reigns in the world unto death—temporal, spiritual, and eternal. But

in the conscience also, when the power of sin is made known, it "reigns *unto death*;" that is, death takes place in a man's conscience, and he is brought down into the dust of death, without help, hope, or strength.

In this reign unto death, all God's people are, more or less, exercised; and until they are led by divine teaching into the mysteries of grace, it is a subject that always has and always will puzzle them. They are baffled, that do what they will, sin should still overcome them; that let them vow, promise, resolve, sin still masters them, and overpowers all their vows, promises, and resolutions. This is what baffles God's people. When they are trying to be holy, to serve God, to pray to him, and worship him acceptably, sin still keeps working in their carnal minds, bringing forth fruit unto death; and thus continually casts them down, and breaks through all their oppositions, all their strength, and all their resolutions against it.

3. But there is another word added, which is, "*the abounding of sin.*" What is the figure implied here? That sin is not merely a tyrant reigning unto death, but that it abounds and overflows; like a mighty river, which floods its banks; or, like a common sewer, choked up with filth, which finds its way through, and oozes out through every crack and crevice. So sin abounds and overflows, and makes itself manifest in every thing a man thinks, says, or does. No place is free from the intrusion of sin; not the pulpit, nor the pew, nor the Lord's table. We cannot get into the most secret retirement, but sin will be present. It will intrude itself, more or less, and abound continually, thrusting its hateful face into those seasons and moments, when a man would fain be most free from it; and when, if he could, he would have none but God alone to fill his heart. The abounding of sin every vessel of mercy must experimentally learn and know for himself; and a

most distressing thing it is for a man to learn experimentally, whose conscience is made tender, whose heart is touched by God's Spirit, and who desires to serve him acceptably, in "reverence and godly fear."

II.—But we pass on to consider these three points of comparison and parallel, which the Apostle has brought forward, to show that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

1. He speaks, then, of the *reign* of grace as opposed to the reign of sin. Does sin reign? Does it exercise arbitrary authority? Is it represented as a mighty monarch, slaughtering his thousands and his millions? Grace comes forth a mightier monarch, as reigning over the soul in opposition to, and to the deposition of this tyrant that rules in the carnal mind. And what is grace? Grace is the free favour and undeserved mercy of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, the love which the Three-one God bears to the elect family. Thus grace has special objects on which it is fixed; and it is determined to bring those special objects into the enjoyment of that love which has been eternally fixed upon them. Thus, we can only understand the reign of grace as we understand experimentally the reign of sin; and until we have felt the iron enter into our souls, and known the galling fetters that sin, the mighty tyrant, lays on us, we never can know anything experimentally, nor rejoice in the feeling of our being delivered from this yoke by the interposition of the mightier monarch Grace. Grace then reigned in the bosom of the triune God before the foundation of the world; *there* it had its origin, *there* it began to reign. And grace reigned in the eternal Covenant, which was entered into betwixt the Three Persons of the Godhead, on behalf of the elect family. Grace reigned also in the incarnation of the Son of God, in the mediation of Jesus, in all his actings, in all his sufferings,

in his cross, in his grave, in his resurrection, in his ascension, and in his present intercession at God's right hand.

But, as we have endeavoured to trace experimentally the reign of sin, so we will endeavour to trace also experimentally the reign of grace. As we know no more of sin than as it is opened up in our hearts, and laid upon our conscience; so we know no more of grace than as we are brought into a feeling and spiritual enjoyment of it. Thus, until we have been actually slaughtered by sin, until we have groaned beneath the yoke of this mighty monarch, until we have put up hundreds of cries and thousands of petitions to God to deliver us from it, until we have learned to abhor the exercise of this hateful tyrant's authority over us, and have cried unto the Lord from the depth of a broken heart to deliver us from being tyrannized over, we know nothing experimentally of the reign of grace. Now sin is opened up in the conscience of the child of God in all its minute and secret workings: it is not merely open actions, such as the world calls sin, that are laid upon the conscience of a living man; but sin, in all its secret workings, and minute actings, is opened up in his soul by the Spirit of God, and a solemn sentence of condemnation passed on it. Under this inward sense of sin, the child of God groans; he sees and feels his presumption, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness; his enmity, blasphemy, rebelliousness, fretfulness, impatience, peevishness, and evil thoughts against a holy and a good God. And as all these secret evils work in the heart of the child of God, he groans experimentally under them, and desires to be delivered from their dominion. He wants not so much the deliverance from outward sins, from which God in a great measure keeps him, as a deliverance from the inward tyranny which sin exercises over him. Thus grace begins experimentally to reign; and it is known, in the first instance, by the opposition that it makes to sin in its inward and

minute workings.

The Apostle, speaking of sin, classes it under two leading heads, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Cor. 7:1.) He divides sin into two leading branches: the filth of the flesh, and the filth of the spirit; that is, into sins which we may call carnal sins, and into sins which we call spiritual sins; carnal sins, consisting in the workings of the flesh towards the objects of the flesh; and spiritual sin: enmity, infidelity, rebellion, peevishness, and fretfulness against a good and a holy God. Thus, as sin reigns in these two distinct channels, so grace begins also to reign by checking sin in these two distinct channels. Is the heart, then, going after evil? Does the eye lust after forbidden things? Is the carnal mind panting after the world and worldly objects; and does sin seek thus to reign in the flesh? Grace begins a secret opposition to these carnal workings, by showing how hateful they are in the sight of a holy God, bringing the soul to a real honest confession of them, enabling it to cast its burden upon the Lord, and pleading with him that he would prevent it being overcome by them, and supply secret strength, that it may not be entangled and cast down. So with respect to "the filth of the spirit;" the secret enmity, rebellion, obscenity, blasphemy, and rebelliousness that the soul feels against God and godliness; grace reigns by making these things hateful, and raising up in the heart sighs, groans, and earnest petitions, that they might not break forth, but that God, by his blessed Spirit, would check them and keep them under. But as sin has reigned, so grace must much more reign. Sin, though it may long exercise its authority over us, yet meets at length with a conqueror mightier than it. Grace therefore reigns in the pardoning of those sins which the soul groans and grieves under, in healing those backslidings which it is continually committing, and covering with a robe



of righteousness the continual iniquities which burst forth from the depths of the carnal mind. Thus grace is especially manifested, not merely in checking the hidden evils of the heart, but in pardoning them, blotting them out, covering and hiding them from the face of offended justice, and casting them into the depths of the sea, where when sought for they shall no more be found.

2. But the reign of sin was "*unto death.*" Therefore, in order to find a parallel, grace must reign "*unto eternal life.*" It was the object of the mighty tyrant Sin to kill eternally all his subjects. This haughty despot is represented as trampling down all his subjects into an ever-enduring hell. But grace, as an almighty monarch of mercy and love, steps forth, so to speak, from the bosom of God, meets the arbitrary tyrant, checks him in the career of victory, and plucks the objects of eternal mercy from his cruel hands. Therefore, to meet and check him, grace must meet him on those points where he chiefly reigns. Does sin reign, for instance, in trampling down his subjects into *temporal* death? Grace meets him in this reign, by taking away the sting of death, which is sin, and hereafter raising up the bodies of those who "fall asleep in Jesus," to eternal life. Did sin again reign, in spiritually killing, in utterly paralyzing every faculty, so as to make men "dead in trespasses and sins?" Grace reigns in quickening elect souls, and breathing the life of God into them. Does sin reign in trampling down its subjects into an eternity of misery? Grace reigns against the mighty tyrant, by raising the soul up to enjoy eternal life in Christ!

Thus, grace reigns not merely in opposition to sin, but so as to undo all that sin has done, and to counteract every thing which it has brought about. It thus completes its victories, and triumphs over all the miseries and evils which sin has caused, leading captivity captive. And here is its sweetness

and blessedness, here is its triumphant and omnipotent character, that it does not merely counteract sin in all its workings, but triumphs over it; it not merely meets it half way, and fights it on equal terms; not merely resists it, and by resisting checks it—it does more, for it completely overthrows it, and rescues the happy objects of God's mercy from all the miseries and all the wretchedness which sin has brought about and brought into their souls. And this is known experimentally, when grace brings the sweet enjoyment of this divine truth into the soul, and when the blessed Spirit is pleased to lead it into a knowledge of what grace is, and persuades it of its interest in what grace has done, and what grace is still doing.

3. But the third point of comparison of which the Apostle speaks, is, the *superabounding of grace* over the abounding of sin, "where sin abounded, grace did *much more abound*." Does sin abound? Is it not continually flooding our hearts, and oozing up in filthy streams every hour? Can we live a moment without the aboundings of sin? Do we speak? Sin is there. Are we silent? Sin is there. Do we hide ourselves from the world? Sin still intrudes itself. Do we go into business? There sin is still our companion. Go where we will, do what we will, still, more or less, there is the abounding of sin in the carnal mind; and O! the many sighs, groans, and tears which God's people are obliged to pour out on account of the abounding of sin in their wretched, wretched hearts. But "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." If grace merely abounded, and did not "much more abound," it would be, so to speak, like a drawn battle, like a conflict between two mighty warriors, both departing from the field claiming the victory. But grace "much more abounds;" it comes off a triumphant conqueror: it does not merely meet sin half way, and then retire from the contest; but "where sin abounded," grace, rich, matchless grace, "much more abounds,"

overtopping, overflowing, and superabounding over all the heights and depths of sin. For instance, is our heart (and do we not feel it to be so?) the receptacle for everything base and vile? A cage of every unclean bird? Is our imagination polluted? Is our eye continually lusting after forbidden things? Is our heart continually "hewing out cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water?" Is every thing that is base and filthy, every thing that is blasphemous and obscene, to be found in our carnal mind—working death, guilt, and condemnation in the conscience? Do what we will, do we still feel the horrid overflowings and aboundings of sin? Is all that we do to keep it down, like casting a dam over a mighty river, that makes the stream flow higher and higher, until it carries away the dam itself upon its rushing waters? Does sin then abound daily and hourly, in every thought and word, in every look, in every imagination, in every thing that we do, and every thing that we are engaged in? Sure I am, if we know our own hearts, we shall find sin abounding in every word, thought, and action. Now, if grace did not "much more abound," we might be left under the guilt and power of sin; but "where sin abounded," grace steps in, and "much more abounds." However high the tide of sin may rise, the tide of grace rises higher; however sin may overflow the carnal mind, sin is, with all its oozing filth, washed away "by the fountain once opened for sin and uncleanness," which rises high above the highest tides of sin, and washes white the blackest soul that has an interest in Christ's finished work. If it were not so, God's people must sink and utterly perish; if they did not at times feel the superaboundings of grace overtopping and overflowing the aboundings of sin, they must sink, utterly sink, in the deep waters.

Now, where sin abounds, it brings guilt into the conscience. A man cannot feel the workings of sin in him, without feeling guilt laid upon his soul, if his conscience is tender in God's

fear; and thus, day by day, and sometimes hour by hour, as sin works, guilt works also. Is your eye caught by forbidden objects? Is there an adulterous look, an idolatrous desire? Guilt follows. Has an envious, revengeful thought been indulged? Guilt follows, in a greater or less degree, where the conscience is tender. Is there some rebellious, blasphemous, presumptuous rising against God? Guilt lays hold of the conscience, whenever grace has effectually laid hold of it. Is there some secret plan to exalt or raise ourselves, at the expense of another? Where the heart is tender, guilt arrests it immediately. Is there some rash and hasty word spoken in the heat of temper—some unkind expression levelled at a brother—some malicious pleasure in relating his faults? Guilt instantaneously follows, in a tender conscience. It is thus, by the workings of guilt, that we know the aboundings of sin. Men for the most part are ignorant of the inward workings of sin; but not those whose hearts are tender by God's work upon them. Often sin falls heavily on the conscience of the child of God; he does not think it a matter of little consequence, like some who stand high in a profession, but whose hearts are as hard as the nether millstone. But where the conscience is tender in God's fear, what are called little sins will often be a heavy burden upon the soul. Therefore, as sin abounds, guilt abounds; and as sin abounds sometimes every hour, guilt will sometimes abound every hour. The more that the abounding of sin is felt in its hideous character before a heart-searching Jehovah; the more minutely that the heart is watched, the more clearly shall we see the inward workings of what is contrary to God and godliness; and the more we see of the abounding, the oozing, and the working up of sin from the depths of the carnal mind, the more will guilt and shame take possession of the soul; and in this way are opened up the superaboundings of grace over these wretched evils. The more a man knows of the mysteries of sin, the more will he

know of the mystery of grace: the more experimental insight he has into the depths of the fall, the deeper acquaintance will he eventually have of the riches of sovereign grace. In order, therefore, to pluck up these blessed pearls from the bottom of the great deep, we must go down experimentally into the depths of our fallen nature; we must sink, more or less, into this unfathomable abyss, to find the pearl of great price at the bottom. To talk, therefore, of the superaboundings of grace, and know nothing of the aboundings of sin; to have grace on our lips, and never have felt guilt on the conscience; to boast of what Christ has done for sinners, and know nothing of the depth of *our own* fall, and the horrible devilism of *our own* fallen nature—is but talking of things at a distance, and not speaking of things we experimentally feel and know.

But where sin has really abounded in a man's heart, and has been opened up to him by the Spirit of God, he stands as a sinner before the eyes of him with whom he has to do. He finds abounding in his heart every thing that is hateful and loathsome in the sight of a pure and a holy God. This makes him want to know something of the superaboundings of grace. And he finds to his soul's joy, that grace "much more abounds;" and that there is no depth to which there is not a corresponding height, that there can be no abounding of sin without a corresponding superabounding of grace; and O! how this exalts the sovereign grace of God, to find that grace can and does overtop those horrible, unceasing, repeated, and aggravated iniquities, which are daily and hourly flowing out of a polluted heart.

But again. Grace also superabounds in delivering the soul from the *power of sin*, "sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." When grace pardons sin, grace also delivers from the dominion of sin.

And how does grace deliver from the dominion of sin? By communicating a secret power, whereby the man is no longer the slave of his lusts and passions, and sin no longer has power to domineer over him. God never suffers his people to live and die under the power of sin; he will deliver them sooner or later from the power of evil. It is true, he always finds sin and guilt in them, and they always groan, grieve, and cry unto God on account of the aboundings of sin. But God will not suffer them to live and die under its dominion. He will deliver them from the dominion of pride, presumption, hypocrisy, and carnality. He will not suffer them to live in anything which is contrary to his holy word, but by making their consciences tender in his fear, he will "keep them from evil, that it may not grieve them."

But it is added, "through righteousness unto eternal life." It is all "through righteousness;" for it all flows through Christ's righteousness. Justice has been satisfied, therefore grace may now superabound, which, unless there were this "righteousness," it could not do. God does not pardon sin, and heal backslidings, as an indulgent parent winks at the faults and follies of his children. God indeed pardons sin and heals backslidings, but it is still "through righteousness," in consequence of the satisfaction which his dear Son has paid to justice. Satisfaction therefore, having been paid to justice, by the sacrifice of the Son of God, iniquity is blotted out, and sin put away. Grace now freely flows to the objects of mercy; and it is in this way only that grace enters into a man's soul. It flows to him through the channel of the Mediator's death, through a crucified Christ. When grace, therefore, comes into the believer's soul, through the righteousness which is in Jesus Christ, he sees that it flows through the channels of the Saviour's agonies, groans, sweat, death, and blood. Thus, he not only finds that grace superabounds over the aboundings of sin, but that it flows through the sufferings of Christ, and

comes through the blood of the Mediator: and that grace could never have so superabounded over the aboundings of sin, unless it had flowed through the meritorious sufferings of the Son of God. It therefore exalts grace in his eyes, that it should have come into his heart through this channel; it makes him see the hideousness of sin that requires such a sacrifice; it opens up the depth of the fall to see that he could only be delivered by having such a substitute; it reveals the wondrous mercy of God, that he did not spare his only begotten Son, but that he gave him up freely that he might bleed and die, in order that "grace might reign through righteousness," and that grace might superabound over the aboundings of sin, to pluck its favoured objects from the depth of the fall.

But it reigns, not only "through righteousness," but "*unto eternal life.*" It lands safe in glory all its favoured objects: whatever darkness befalls them, whatever temptations they may be labouring under, whatever difficulties trouble them, whatever burdens may oppress them; however vast the reign of sin over them, and the abounding of sin in them, grace will reign and superabound unto eternal life: it will not leave them in the conflict, neither let them die in the battle; but it will bring them off more than conquerors through him that hath loved them.

In order, then, to get at these precious blessings, to know what grace is in its reign over sin, and in its superaboundings over the aboundings of iniquity, we must be led experimentally into the depths of the fall. We must be led by God himself into the secrets of our own heart; we must be brought down into distress of mind on account of our sin, and the idolatry of our fallen nature. And when, do what we will, sin will still work, reign, and abound, and we are brought to soul-poverty, helplessness, destitution, and misery,—and

cast ourselves down at the footstool of his mercy—then we begin to see and feel the reign of grace, in quickening our souls, in delivering us from the wrath to come, and in preserving us from the dominion of evil. We begin to see then that grace superabounds over all the aboundings of sin in our evil hearts, and as it flows through the channel of the Saviour's sufferings, that it will never leave its favoured objects till it brings them into the enjoyment of eternal life. And if this does not melt and move the soul, and make a man praise and bless God, nothing will, nothing can. But until we have entered into the depths of our own iniquities, until we are led into the chambers of imagery, and brought to sigh, groan, grieve, and cry under the burden of guilt on the conscience, and the workings of secret sin in the heart—it cannot be really known. And to learn it thus, is a very different thing from learning it from books, or ministers. To learn it in the depths of a troubled heart, by God's own teaching, is a very different thing from learning it from the words of a minister, or even from the word of God itself. We can never know these things savingly and effectually, till God himself is pleased to apply them with his own blessed power, and communicate an unctuous savour of them to our hearts, that we may know the truth, and find to our soul's consolation, that the truth makes us free.