

Hey, do you want to limit sin in your life? But perhaps you think that's not even possible? Or perhaps you actually think that God ordained the sins you and everyone else have committed or will ever commit! Don't laugh: there are a number of folks who believe and teach a philosophical system labeled as Christian theology where, as one esteemed college professor at a leading Christian college wrote: ["\[God\] himself brings about...evil aspects of our world for his glory...God's having even brought about the Nazis' brutality at Birkenau and Auschwitz as well as the terrible killings of \[serial killer\] Dennis Rader and even the sexual abuse of a young child."](#) ...Forgive me, folks, but I'm just reporting what was written and then included by his famous editor in a book of lauded essays—with the editor himself well-known for opinions aligned with that philosophy. Now, it's interesting to consider this about that: of all those churches who are aligned with this system of thought, have you ever seen even one that posted this quote about God bringing about evil (or anything like it) on their website, supposedly for the glory of God! But we must wonder, *why not?* If God's "bringing about" of evil is the best interpretation of the Bible, why don't pastors and churches with that theology go with their best punch and shout out *their jaw-dropping alignment that God glorifies Himself by bringing about evil* like torture camps, serial killings, and child molestation?

Hey, we must confidently hit the pause button right here to say *this* in response to all *that*: *Really?* The Apostle John writes by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that "...God is love." (1 John 4:8) That's right, the very character of God is love. And, *come on now*, is it the true loving character of God in action with His supposed "bringing about" the terrible acts of the Nazis, serial killers, and child molesters? *Really?*

The reality is, God reveals throughout the Bible that sinful paths are willfully chosen by people every day, yes, *choices made by those in spite of and contrary to God's will!* The historical examples of this in the Bible are many, but why not quote Jesus Himself in His speaking to the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:37 ESV): "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" Wow, so God would have taken a specific action *but for the posture of those in Jerusalem not willing!* Yeah, God would have *often* gathered His children...*but the people were not willing!*

So, the truth is, each person faces choices like the Joshua of old famously did (Joshua 24:15): "And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Yes, make your choice—that's true in Joshua's time...and true now! Are you serving Christ and His Kingdom...or Satan, the right-now ruler of the kingdoms of this world?

Now, this series is about the topic of "limits" and, today, we're talking about we can limit sin in our lives. Oh no, you might be saying, sin can't be limited or reduced in people's lives. Well, then, we must say that if sin can be increased as per Romans 5:20, then can't sin be limited by avoiding how it can be increased?

So, it's in this vein that we must start by *disarming the widespread and often deep-seated belief among many Christians over the centuries that the Mosaic law in the lives of folks reduces sin*. Yes, if you're like many folks, you might tend to believe that the Mosaic Law reduces sin. But the Bible teaches just the opposite! Romans 5:20 (ESV) is very clear about this: "Now the law came in to *increase the trespass...*"

Wow, let me say that again: yes, "the law came in to increase the trespass..." That's silly, you might say, I don't remember any of my pastors or Bible teachers over the years *ever* taught that the law increases sin...in fact, they taught me exactly the opposite! Frankly, that fact is why we're talking about it today.

So, right to the point about the law increasing sin. Let's evaluate an everyday example about your personal behavior: how fast do you drive in a 55 mph speed zone? If you're like the vast majority of drivers, your answer is something like "five over." Yes, you deliberately find out what the law is *so that you can break it*, driving say, 60 mph. But why don't you go 89 mph? Well, if you're truthful, it's that you don't want the consequences of getting caught driving 89! At the same time, you *don't* think you'll have a consequence for breaking the law just a little bit by driving 60! But that's silly, you say, what a trivial, irrelevant example!

But it *is* relevant to the way we handle Mosaic law, too. Many Christians wouldn't dream of lying as a witness in a murder trial. But many of those same folks don't hesitate to routinely falsely represent the full truth in everyday gossip. Or maybe they want to flatter, so they lie to someone's face about, say, how attractive they look today! Truth is, many Christians use their "white lies" as a sort of "social lubricant" in their dealings with others. You see, even Christians apparently think they somehow have struck a bargain with God that their supposedly smaller lies are acceptable, but bigger ones are not. After all, that's in the Ten Commandments, right?...*"You shall not bear false witness—but only when it comes to the big stuff!"*

As we've said, God's truth is in Romans 5:20: *the law increases sin*. God knew this when He gave the Law to the Israelites. They had already been disobedient—from the time of the miracles at the Red Sea to Mt. Sinai. The whole way, they weren't listening to and obeying God's voice (Jeremiah 11:8)! So, God gave this truth that tends to shred everyone's little rulebook, even many lifelong Christians: *the law increases sin!*

Yet, Christians in America in the 1960s were very alarmed when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Ten Commandments couldn't be displayed in public classrooms anymore. In fact, there's a movement among some American Christians today to get those commandments posted in public classrooms again—with a kind of a near-unanimous understanding and belief that, in general, sin would be *decreased!* But we know that the Bible teaches that the Law increases sin—both for the Israelites and for us Christians!

So, we must ask this question: instead, why don't Christians work to get John 3:16-17 posted in every classroom? Yes, the truth in the Bible that first and foremost addresses all of humanity's sin properly and smartly is John 3:16-17: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." Yes, *every person worldwide is eligible!*

After all, here's even more depth, as recorded in Romans 5 again: "Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 5, verses 18-21)

You see, righteousness claimed through the Mosaic Law does not work—James tells us that if we are guilty of breaking even one law (which we are!), we're guilty of the whole law (James 2:10). But, hallelujah, God made provision for every person at the Cross...to be made righteous through Christ and Him crucified!

Here's the thing. It starts with the simple hearing of the gospel, like John 3:16-17. This is the gift of salvation, the gift of grace through faith. But the hearers must believe...*yes, they must receive the gift!* That is not a "work"...rather, belief in Christ is simply the receiving of a gift! Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." But belief is still a choice by the recipient. It's like if someone offers you \$1 million; it's not a completed gift without you agreeing to it. But receiving a gift is still not a "work!"

And such gift-receiving believers are made righteous by faith, not by the Mosaic Law. "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe." (Romans 3:22) This is just like Abraham's faith and righteousness! That's why believers are children of Abraham—not children of Moses! *Startling truth!*

And believers are filled with the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). And here's what the Apostle Paul said to believers in Galatians 5:22-23: "...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..." *There we have it!* When believers are led by the Holy Spirit, love, joy, gentleness and self-control is the fruit—and *not one of these fruits is sinful, of course!* You see, while the law increases sin, believers' surrender to the Holy Spirit's leading bears the fruit of the love of God!

So yeah, sin can indeed be limited by each believer yielding to the Spirit's leading! Yes. *Victory. Every. Day.*

A&A: Application & Action

1. Do you think Christians willfully make choices in spite of and contrary God's will? Or is it true that all the sinful, evil actions of even Christians are fully determined and "brought about" by God? What does your church believe in its confessions and practices? Discuss.
2. Reread the notes in the podcast about the Mosaic Law as well as the Apostles James' point about breaking even one point of the law. Do you believe that the best path to not be guilty of breaking God's law is to commit to your better keeping the Ten Commandments? Or is it the believer's privilege to gleefully accept God's great gifts of salvation and grace and submit the Holy Spirit in order to bear great fruits—with the benefits of crowding out sinful behavior? Discuss.
3. Why do you think many Christians in leadership tend to place emphasis on keeping the Ten Commandments as the goal of the Christian life rather than being led by the Holy Spirit and yielding the fruits noted in Galatians 5:22-23? Discuss.