

IDENTITY OF THE LAW IN
ROMANS 4:15b

BY WALTER J. CLAEYS

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GRACE TH

PREFACE

The writer is eternally indebted to his Savior for giving direction and purpose to an aimless life by calling him into preparation for the ministry. This call has provided occasion for the assignment of and strength for the completion of such tasks as the writing of this critical monograph.

Humanly speaking, the writer is indebted: to his wife, whose labor of love in the thankless job of the typewriting of this paper has been undertaken in the spirit of a co-laborer; to Dr. John Rea, whose scholarly and wise counsel as faculty advisor to the writer have given this paper any acceptability and excellencies which it might possess; and to the faculty of Grace Theological Seminary, whose faithful instruction has been an indispensable source in the preparation of this paper.

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INTRODUCTION

Having been saved in an atmosphere of semi-legalism, and then having realized the Biblical basis of the doctrine of the security of the believer, the writer has since been greatly concerned with all matters concerning the place of the law in relation to the Christian.

Also the text under consideration has been used variously in sermons in the writer's hearing. One preacher has used this "no law---no transgression" passage to prove that before the time of the Law of Moses there was no sin. Another announced that pre-Moses man did not realize his sin was sin. Lastly, and more recently, an expositor used this text in his message to prove infant salvation.

All the above have combined to interest the author in an investigation to determine the correct meaning of Rom. 4:15. This paper constitutes such an investigation.

Two problems confront us in determining the accurate meaning of the passage: the meaning of "law" and the meaning of "transgression." Once these are ascertained, some conclusions may then be drawn.

Due to the nature of the problems and of the views on them, refutation as such will be given in the writer's interpretation section, mostly by means of the positive presentation of the writer's view.

Bible quotations are taken from the American Standard Version, 1901.

GREEK TEXT

According to Novum Testamentum Graece,
edited by Nestle

ὁ γὰρ νόμος ὀργὴν
κατεργάζεται· οὐ δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν
νόμος, οὐδὲ παράβασις.

NOTE: Some manuscripts read γὰρ instead of δε;
but support for this is insignificant.

ENGLISH VERSIONS

Wiclif New Testament, 1380

for the lawe worchith wraththe, for where is no lawe
there is no trespas, nether is trespassynge

Tyndale New Testament, 1534

Because the lawe causeth wrathe. For where no law is,
there is no transgression.

Geneva New Testament, 1557

For the Lawe causeth wrath. for where no Lawe is,
there is no transgression.

Rheims Version, 1582

For the Lavv vvorketh vvraath. For vvhere is no lavv,
neither is there preuarication.

King James Version, 1611

Because the law worketh wrath: for where no Law is,
there is no transgression.

Woodruff's New Testament, 1852

The law lays a foundation for divine displeasure: For
where there is no law there can be no transgression of
the law.

Noyes' New Testament, 1868

For the Law is the cause of wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.

The Twentieth Century New Testament, 1900

Law, indeed, brings punishment; but where no law exists, no breach of it is possible.

American Standard Version, 1901

for the law worketh wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.

Weymouth's New Testament, 1902

For the Law inflicts punishment; but where no Law exists, there can be no violation of Law.

Montgomery's Centenary Translation, 1924

For the law works wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.

Goodspeed's New Testament, 1931

For the Law only brings down God's wrath; where there is no law, there is no violation of it.

Williams's New Testament, 1937

For the law results in wrath alone; but where there is no law, there can be no violation of it.

The New Testament in Basic English, 1941

for the outcome of the law is wrath; but where there is no law it will not be broken.

Berkeley Version, 1945

Because the law eventuates in indignation; but where there is no Law there is no transgression.

Moffatt's Bible, 1950

(What the Law produces is the Wrath; not the promise of God; where there is no law, there is no transgression either.)

New World Translation, 1950

In reality the Law produces wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there any transgression

Revised Standard Version, 1952

For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

Phillips New Testament, 1957

And, indeed, if there were no Law the question of sin would not arise.

The Amplified New Testament, 1958

For the Law results in divine wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression of it either .

Confraternity Version, 1941

For the Law works wrath; for where there is no law, neither is there transgression.

Doctrinal Significance of Romans 4:15b

The Epistle to the Romans is one of principles. Paul is the apostle who logically reasons to and from divine underlying truths. To read his words is to observe a great mind expertly weaving profound truths into the basic and critical questions of man's heart. To be able to grasp some of the divine principles which he uses is not only interesting and rewarding, but it is extremely necessary for the understanding of the whole of the apostle's writings. Often he will not clearly state the foundational truth on which he is building, but then sometimes he does. The latter is the case in our verse: "Where there is no law, neither is there transgression."

Law and transgression. Wherever Rome was there was law. Where is the man who knows nothing of the legal system of the indestructible empire? Paul builds upon the Romans' familiarity with the idea of law to arrive at his desired goal.

And wherever the Jew was there was just as surely controversy over transgression, sin. The Jew

had a way of exempting himself from guilt. Paul himself also had one day justified himself as being a member of the family of Abraham, rather than as possessing the faith that Abraham possessed.

Combine Paul the Jew, Paul the Roman, Paul the learned, and Paul the Spirit-directed and we are confronted with one who meets every objection with irrefutable logic and presents divine principles with firmness and clarity.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

Major Problem: What is the Meaning of the
Term "law" in this Clause?

Minor Problem: What is the Meaning of the
Term "transgression"
in this Clause?

VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

Major Problem: What is the Meaning
of the Term "Law"?

The Mosaic Law View

The authors holding this view say that "law" in this clause is strictly limited to the law given by Moses. They would give this sense: "Before the law of Moses was given, there could be no transgression of it," making the statement simple and obvious. De Wette clearly states that this "...refers to the time before the Mosaic law..."¹

Among the many others essentially holding to the above view are Skinner,² Beet,³ Stifler,⁴

¹De Wette, quoted by Henry Alford, The New Testament For English Readers, (London: Rivingtons, 1872), II, 34.

²J. A. T. Skinner, cited in Exell, Joseph S., Romans, Vol. I of The Biblical Illustrator, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., n. d.), p. 293.

³Joseph Agar Beet, A Commentary On St. Paul's Epistle To The Romans (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1883), p. 133.

⁴James M. Stifler, The Epistle To The Romans (2nd ed.; New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1897), p. 79.

Robins,⁵ Williams,⁶ Sanday,⁷ Wordsworth,⁸ and Dodd.⁹

Law In General View

Those holding to this view say this term re-
divine law in general, regardless of form or
of revelation, thus including all divine stan-
dards of God, etc. For instance, Leask states:
"that either here or already also v. 13-14

Paul's law alone is meant, restricts what Paul fails
to say. "C. here holding that this is not limited
to divine law, but that it is general are Sumner,¹¹
Williams,¹² Hodge,¹³ Scott,¹⁴ Benson,¹⁵

10a. C. H. Leask, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus: Lutheran Book

⁵Thomas Robins, A Suggestive Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle To The Romans (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1873), I, 258.

⁶N. P. Williams, "The Epistle To The Romans," A New Commentary On Holy Scripture, ed. Charles Gore, Henry Leighton Goudge and Alfred Guillaume (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929), p. 460.

⁷W. Sanday, "The Epistle To The Romans" Ellicott's Commentary on The Whole Bible, ed. Charles John Ellicott (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), VII, p. 221.

⁸Christopher Wordsworth, The New Testament Of Our Lord And Saviour Jesus Christ (5th ed.; London: Rivingtons, 1870), II, 222.

⁹C. H. Dodd, The Epistle Of Paul To The Romans, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary, ed. James Moffatt (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), p. 69.

Law In General View

Those holding to this view say this term refers to divine law in general, regardless of form or method of revelation, thus including all divine standards, laws of God, etc.. For instance, Lenski states: "The idea that either here or already also v. 13-14 the Mosaic law alone is meant, restricts what Paul fails to restrict."¹⁰ Others holding that this is not limited to the Mosaic law, but that it is general are Summers,¹¹ Pridham,¹² Williams,¹³ Hodge,¹⁴ Scott,¹⁵ Benson,¹⁶

¹⁰R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation Of St. Paul's Epistle To The Romans (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1936), p. 316.

¹¹T. O. Summers, The Epistle Of Paul The Apostle to the Romans (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Methodist Pub. House, 1881), p. 47.

¹²Arthur Pridham, Notes and Reflections on The Epistle to the Romans (3rd ed. rev. and enlarged; London: William Yapp, 1864), p. 67.

¹³William G. Williams, An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans (Cincinnati: Jennings and Pyle, 1902), p. 155.

¹⁴Charles Hodge, Commentary On The Epistle To The Romans (Rev. ed.; Philadelphia: James S. Claxton, 1864), p. 89.

¹⁵Thomas Scott, The Holy Bible (5th ed.; Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1831), VI, 31.

¹⁶Joseph Benson, The New Testament Of Our Lord And Saviour Jesus Christ (New York: T. Carlton and J. Porter, n.d.), II, 44.

Godet,¹⁷ Gill¹⁸ and Shedd.¹⁹

"Transgression" Signale "sin" View

"Transgression" in this text has no distinctive

force as a term and is to be understood simply

as some authors hold. Shedd,²⁰ Hodge,²¹

²² and Thompson²³ are a few who equate trans-

gression with sin.

¹⁷F. Godet, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, trans. A. Cusin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, reprinted 1956), p. 177

¹⁸John Gill, An Exposition Of The New Testament (London: William Hill Collingridge, 1853), II, 28.

¹⁹William G. T. Shedd, Commentary upon the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879), p. 131.

"Transgression" Equals "Sin" View

"Transgression" in this text has no distinctive significance as a term and is to be understood simply as "sin," some authors hold. Shedd,²⁰ Hodge,²¹ Whitby,²² and Thompson²³ are a few who equate transgression with sin.

²⁰A. J. Valpy, The New Testament (London: 1836), II, 86.

²¹Beet, op. cit., p. 133.

²²William R. Newell, Romans Verse by Verse (Grace Publications, Inc., 1933).

²³Summers, op. cit., p. 47.

²⁴Robinson, op. cit., p. 256.

²⁵J. M. Parry, Synopsis of the Books of the New Testament, ed.; New York: Loizeux Brothers, 1942.

²⁰Ibid., p. 104. ²¹Hodge, op. cit., p. 189.

²²Daniel Whitby, "The Epistle To The Romans," A Critical Commentary And Paraphrase On The Old And New Testament, Symon Patrick et alii (eds.) (Philadelphia: Frederick Scofield and Co., 1877), IV, 546.

²³G. T. Thompson and F. Davidson, "The Epistle To The Romans," The New Bible Commentary, ed. F. Davidson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1953), p. 948.

"Transgression" Equals "Law-Breaking" View

Those holding this view maintain that the term does have a special meaning and that that meaning is violation of some code. The apostle Paul here "does not say, no sin. A transgression refers to a positive act in violation of divine command or prohibition."²⁴ Others who also distinguish between sin and transgression are Beet,²⁵ Newell,²⁶ Summers,²⁷ Robinson,²⁸ Darby,²⁹ Arnold and Ford,³⁰ Lenski,³¹ Meyer,³² and

²⁴A. J. Valpy, The New Testament (London: Author, 1836), II, 86.

²⁵Beet, op. cit., p. 133.

²⁶William R. Newell, Romans Verse by Verse (Chicago: Grace Publications, Inc., 1938)

²⁷Summers, op. cit., p. 47.

²⁸Robinson, op. cit., p. 258.

²⁹J. N. Darby, Synopsis of the Books of the Bible (Rev. ed.; New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1942), IV, 144.

³⁰Albert N. Arnold and D. B. Ford, "Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans," An American Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Alvah Hovey (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1889), p. 44.

³¹Lenski, op. cit.

³²Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Romans, trans. John C. Moore and Edwin Johnson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1889), p. 317.

Wuest.³³

WRITER'S INTERPRETATION

³³Kenneth S. Wuest, Studies in the Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1952), p. 98.

Major Problem: What is the Meaning
of the Term "law"?

Linguistic Argument

M'Caig writes, "The Greek word for 'law' is nomos, νόμος, derived from νέμω, nemo, 'to divide,' 'distribute,' 'apportion,' and generally meant anything established, anything received by usage, a custom, usage, law; in the New Testament a command, law....as used in the New Testament it will be found generally that the term 'law' bears the sense indicated by Austin, and includes 'command,' 'deity,' and 'sanction.'¹ He continues more specifically to show that in the first portion of Romans Paul uses the term in the general sense of a standard.

In this great epistle, written to people at the center of the famous legal system of Rome, many of them Jews versed in the law of Moses and other Gentiles familiar with the idea of law, its nature its scope and its sway, he first speaks of the Law as a standard, want of conformity to which brings condemnation.²

¹Archibald M'Caig, "Law in the New Testament," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 1939 ed., p. 1844

²Ibid., p. 1848.

Although his first use is in reference to standards, Paul switches then to a special law, the Mosaic. This is clearly seen, for instance, in chapter four. Here Abraham is the great illustration of justification apart from works of righteousness, specifically apart from the keeping of the Law of Moses. The Law was given after the lifetime of Abraham so he could have known nothing of it. He believed God and therefore had to be justified by faith alone.

After the promise is seen to have come to Abraham and his seed exclusively through faith, immediately Paul shows that the Law could not have worked the promise for them, stating: "for the law worketh wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there transgression" (Rom. 4:15).

Remember, then, that the term "law" is used variously and in many relationships by the Apostle Paul throughout Romans: in reference to God's standards, to the Mosaic law, to the law of the husband (Rom. 7:1-3), and to the law of sin (7:25), to say nothing of the various uses in his other epistles. Therefore, this writer is forced to the opinion that the meaning of the term "law" as used in Rom. 4:15 cannot be definitely ascertained on the basis of Paul's usage; usage can only limit the possible meanings.

The article is used in the Greek in the first

clause of our verse and is omitted in the second; notice: "for the law worketh wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there transgression." Generally, in relation to the use of the article, "whenever the Greek article occurs, the object is certainly definite. When it is not used, the object may or may not be."³ "Sometimes with a noun which the context proves to be definite the article is not used. This places stress upon the qualitative aspect of the noun rather than its mere identity. An object of thought may be conceived of from two points of view: as to identity or quality. To convey the first point of view the Greek uses the article; for the second the anarthrous construction is used."⁴ Therefore, from a study of the presence or absence of the Greek article, we may conclude that the first use of "law" in our verse is in a definite sense; that is, with emphasis on identity. To determine exactly what its identification is we must turn to the context. The whole subject of context will be discussed thoroughly shortly. The second use of "law," which is anarthrous, from the sole standpoint of

³A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (4th ed.; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), p. 756.

⁴H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951), p. 1459.

the absence of the article leaves us in question. It may be definite, having the article omitted because of proximity to, reference to, and identification with the term in the first clause where the article is present. Or it may be meant to be indefinite, with emphasis on quality. The quality of law would be principle, standard. We cannot tell yet.

On the contrary, no less scholars than Gifford⁵ and Godet have come to a conclusion: "The article *ὁ* is wanting here before *νόμος*, law. And rightly so; for this is a general maxim which does not apply specifically to the Jews and the Jewish law (as 15a). The Gentiles also have a law..."⁶

Contextual Argument

Only context can determine for us. In the case of the first clause, the writer believes that "the law" which works wrath has a definite and limited reference to the Mosaic law. This is the only specific law which it could mean in this fourth-chapter context. This understanding makes for an accurate statement; the law of Moses does work wrath. Nothing is to be gained except the wrath of God (not the wrath of man toward

⁵E. H. Gifford, The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (London: John Murray, 1886), p. 105.

⁶Godet, op. cit., p. 177.

God as a few hold) by him who endeavors to justify himself by the keeping of Moses' law. Paradise does not await that man, instead God's condemnation only. Paradise awaits only those who turn to God in faith, who are faith people, not law people. "And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness," "...but through the righteousness of faith," "...it is of faith..."---all in this fourth chapter of Romans. The purpose of the law was to expose and intensify sin and thus God's wrath was called down.

"But where there is no law, neither is there transgression." What this "law" has reference to is our main concern here. This writer's belief is that it is not limited to the Mosaic law but that it is broader, including all of God's standards.

The immediate context of verse fifteen would argue for Mosaic law exclusively since the first clause speaks of the Mosaic law. Some take exception that 15a is Mosaic law, saying that it is universal law.⁷ Regardless of which it is there is one clear statement: it works wrath---and says nothing else. Lange states "The natural moral law too worketh wrath."⁸ The writer must disagree with a one-two-three listing by Skinner on

⁷Williams, op. cit., p. 155.

⁸Summers, op. cit., p. 47.

how the law ought to affect our life and conduct. It should lead to "(1 Earnest solicitude, (2 cheerful obedience, and (3 activity for the extension of Christ's rule."⁹ These ideas are not only out of context, they are contrary to the nature and purpose of the law and are contrary to the clear statement here: "the law worketh wrath"---not cheerful obedience. Similarly, the writer disagrees when it is stated or implied that salvation may come through law. "Hence salvation and benefit through the law is doubtful and uncertain, depending upon the free will of the legislated one, which, as a rule, violates rather than keeps the law."¹⁰ For hundreds of years people have been trying to earn salvation by keeping the law---which was never intended for that purpose!

But let us remember that verse and chapter divisions are not included in our statement of belief in inspiration of the Scriptures. We may when necessary bridge or divide verses, or even chapters for that matter. Such may or may not be necessary in this case but this much may be said: as it stands, the verse

⁹Skinner, op. cit., p. 47.

¹⁰Apostolos Makrakis, Interpretation Of The Entire New Testament, trans. Albert George Alexander (Chicago: Orthodox Christian Educational Society, 1950), II, 1339).

division might mislead for although this verse embraces two related ideas, they are distinct contrasts and the latter might well have been stated in a separate verse. Included in one verse they tend to imply identical "law."

In the context of the whole of chapter four, the Mosaic law or the law of Moses is never mentioned as such, but we agree that it is referred to. Law is mentioned five times, twice with the article (vs. 15a and 16) and three times without (vs. 13, 14, 15). They occur in this order: without the article, without, with, without, and then with. Some explain that 15b may be the Mosaic law on the basis that it is anarthrous purposely for it refers to 15a where the article is used, which is Mosaic and thereby identifies the second "law" as Mosaic also. If this is so, then why in the five above-mentioned references to law---all occurring in the space of less than four verses, does Paul state "law" twice anarthrously before stating it with the article? And why, if 15a is agreed to be Mosaic, and if 15b is Mosaic yet needs not the article, why in verse sixteen is the article needed again?

It may be argued which uses of the term "law" are references to Moses' law. The writer's opinion is that the use in 15b is not limited to Mosaic law, even as Paul does not limit himself to works of the law of Moses in his use of the terms "works" and "worketh"

in verses two, four, and five.

Abraham is Paul's prime example of justification by faith, as over against justification by works. The argument is that his justification is either by works or by faith. In Galatians we learn that it could not have been by works of the law of Moses for the law of Moses did not come until hundreds of years after Abraham (Gal. 3:17, Gen. 35:9-15). The law was not retroactive and effective to the extent of disannulling the promise given beforehand. Agreed: Abraham and the law of Moses are the strongholds of the Jew. But Paul is concerned with greater things than just the argument of the Jew. He only uses Abraham as an illustration in the line of argument. Abraham is not only an example of justification apart from Mosaic code but apart from any code, that is, apart from any works of righteousness. Paul's point is that all men, Gentiles included, must be justified apart from works, for all men are under God's wrath.

This brings us to a consideration of the most important factor in determining the meaning of law in 4:15b: the general context of the book up to this point.

The primary and crucial theme of the book to Romans up to 4:15 is that all men are under condemnation and remain so unless justified exclusively by Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul says not only that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness

and unrighteousness of men," but also that the gospel is the "power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." Note that this is true in the case of the Jew and also in the case of the Greek. All men everywhere are guilty before God and all men everywhere can be reconciled to God through Christ.

But why and on what basis are they guilty? Why is not man innocent and justified before God? What has man done to place himself under God's wrath? Notice as we answer these questions how that Paul operates on the principle expressed in 15b, "Where there is no law, neither is there transgression," and on the equivalent implied positive statement: where there is law there is transgression (and wrath).

For a bird's-eye view of how Paul shows that all are under condemnation note the following portion of McClain's brief outline:

I Condemnation---The Wrath of God Revealed (1:18-3:20)

Question---Is the world lost?

Answer---"All the world...guilty before God" (3:19)

- A. The Heathen Condemned (1:18-32)
 - 1. Wrath revealed (18)
 - 2. Wrath deserved (18)
 - 3. Wrath inflicted (24-32)
- B. The Moralist Condemned (2:1-16)
 - 1. By his own judgment (1)
 - 2. By the judgment of God (2-16)
- C. The Jew Condemned (2:17-3:8)
 - 1. Law cannot help him. (17-24)
 - 2. Circumcision cannot help him. (25-27)
 - 3. Birth cannot help him. (28-29)
 - 4. Argument cannot help him. (3:1-8)

D. The World Condemned (3:19-20)

1. The Charge (9)
2. The Indictment (10-18)
3. The Verdict (19-20)¹¹

McClain continues in his little book to elaborate briefly on why men are condemned, as set forth in Romans 1:

The wrath of God is DESERVED by men for two reasons: first, because in the created universe men from the beginning have had a standing revelation, choosing to worship the creature rather than the Creator (21-23).¹²

"Such men [moralists] are condemned in Romans 2 from two standpoints: first, they are condemned by their own judgment (1); and second, they are condemned by the judgment of God (2-16)."¹³

On three possible grounds the Jew would claim to be exempt from condemnation with the rest of the world, namely, on the ground of his law, of his circumcision, and of his birth. Each of these claims is dealt with. His law could not save the Jew (17-24), for he had broken the very law in which he trusted and consequently it had become a witness against him. Nor could his circumcision help him (25-27), because as a means of salvation this circumcision was worthless to one who had broken the law of which it was an integral part.¹⁴

Fourth, and last, in Romans 3 the whole world is pronounced to be guilty before God and therefore condemned because of sin. Notice that the world is condemned on

¹¹Alva J. McClain, "Romans Outlined and Summarized" (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1927), pp. 10, 11.

¹²Ibid., p. 17. ¹³Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 19.

the basis of what they know and what they do, on the basis of a standard---a law if you will---and the breaking of it. In the case of the heathen, "that which is known of God is manifest in them....and they are condemned. Why? "Because that, knowing God, they glorified him not as God..." They chose rather to step aside from the knowledge they clearly received. They transgressed. The Jew reacted similarly in the face of the law of Moses. Whenever and wherever the mind of God is revealed, depraved man rebels and transgression is always inevitable.

A treatment of the Law of Moses would require volumes. When, where and how it came to Moses and to Israel has not important relevance to this paper. Neither are we concerned with a distinction of the various parts of Israel's law: moral, ceremonial and civil. Suffice it to say that the wisdom of God revealed in the written law of the nation of Israel was His will for Israel, and for that matter for all mankind. We are concerned with why it was given.

Why did Israel have to have law? More specifically, for instance, why did God give the ten commandments? Evidently it was God's will that Israel have something in black and white, so to speak; but why? Rom. 5:20, "And the law came in besides, that the trespass might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly." This indicates the startling

fact that the result of the law was the multiplication of sin, the intensification of human depravity.

...as if the very multiplying of restrictions intensified the tendency to sin, brought out the evil in human nature, showed the utter vileness of the sinful heart and the terrible nature of sin, and thus made the need for salvation appear the greater, the very desperateness of the disease showing the need for the remedy and creating the desire for it; the abounding of sin preparing the way for the superabounding of grace.¹⁵

Men were guilty sinners both before and after the Mosaic law. "It is not that men at some time or other have come short of God's glory. They are always coming short."¹⁶ But, oh, how cold man's heart becomes, how easily hardness sets in, how prone he is habitually to shut out the voice of the Spirit until he can hear no more. In God's sight men were always convicted as guilty but they were in need of personal convincing of that fact. Thus the law was added. A parallel idea may be found in Jno. 16:7-11 where the Holy Spirit's job is shown to be one of convincing men of that which is already true.

What "law" is meant? Scott¹⁷ mentions the laws of reason, of tradition, and of Moses all within verses fourteen through seventeen.

¹⁵M'Caig, op. cit., p. 1848.

¹⁶McClain, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁷Scott, op. cit., p. 31.

"The absence of the article before νόμος does not justify us in extending the notion of this word to every legal norm in general."¹⁸ Although the writer agrees with that statement of Philippi, he feels that Hodge has summarized the matter superbly:

It is plain from the whole design and argument of the apostle, that by law, in this whole connection, he means not specifically the law of Moses but the law of God, however revealed as a rule of duty for man. He has reference to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. His purpose is not simply to convince his readers that obedience to the Mosaic law cannot save them, but that obedience in any form, works of any kind, are insufficient for a man's justification before God.¹⁹

"...It is plain that by law, the apostle does not intend the Mosaic law, but law as the standard to which rational creatures are bound to be conformed."²⁰

¹⁸Friedrich Adolph Philippi, Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, trans. J. S. Banks (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1878), I, 187.

¹⁹Hodge, op. cit., p. 188. ²⁰Ibid., p. 190.

"Transgression" in the Greek is παραβάσις, parabasis, and basically, according to Kenneth S. Wuest, means "the overpassing or transgressing of a line."²¹ Dungan defines "transgression":

Zenos says:

This word [transgress] and its derivatives (transgressor, transgression) represent that aspect of sin according to which it is viewed...as...a passing over a line and stepping upon forbidden ground (נָסָה , Nu. 14:41; Jg. 2:20). This is exactly reproduced in the New Testament words παραβαίνεσθαι ...²³ παραβάτης , and

This is only one of five aspects which are given but it

²¹Wuest, op. cit., p. 100.

²²David Roberts Dungan, "Transgression," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 1939 ed.

²³Andrew C. Zenos, "Transgress," A Standard Bible Dictionary, 1909 ed.

seems to be the fitting one.

Only Paul uses $\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\beta\alpha\sigma\varsigma$ in the New Testament, and then only seven times, each usage being translated "transgression" in the ASV. Follow them.

Thou who gloriest in the law, through thy transgression of the law dishonorest thou God?
(Rom. 2:23)

For the law worketh wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression
(Rom. 4:15).

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression, who is a figure of him that was to come.
(Rom. 5:14).

What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made; and it was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator
(Gal. 3:19).

And Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being beguiled, hath fallen into transgression
(I Tim. 2:14).

For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence and reward
(Heb. 2:2).

And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.
(Heb. 9:15)

It is this writer's belief that sin and transgression have always existed---from Adam (Rom. 5:14; I Tim. 2:14) until today. $\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\beta\alpha\sigma\varsigma$ is one aspect of sin but not synonymous with nor equal to sin. It is

sin viewed from the standpoint of commandment, law, principle, obligation, duty.

To say, as some do, that "transgression" in Rom. 4:15 is synonymous with sin is to overlook the various New Testament words for sin---each with a distinctive significance. In 15b "transgression" logically had to be used, for "law" was used in 15a.

Shedd,²⁴ Stuart,²⁵ and Valpy go so far as to imply or state that "Sin proves the existence of a law."²⁶ Strictly speaking, it is transgression, not sin, which proves the existence of law. For certainly revealed law is not responsible for sin but for transgression. There can be and are sins without a specific law against them, but there cannot be the breaking of a law when there is no existing law applicable to the situation.

Hodge virtually agrees with the above authors: "Paul does not make the distinction between sin and transgression, between ἁμαρτία and παράβασις ..." which some assume.

Where there is no law, there can be no sin, because

²⁴Shedd, op. cit., p. 104.

²⁵Moses Stuart, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (2nd ed.; Andover: Gould and Newman, 1835), p. 183.

²⁶Valpy, op. cit., p. 317.

the very idea of sin is the want of conformity to a rule, to which conformity is due; so that where there is no rule or standard there can be no want of conformity."²⁷

The writer is prone to agree with Godet when he says, "So without law there is no sin in the form of transgression."²⁸

But the writer cannot agree with Skinner when he applies the "no law---no transgression" principle to the physical world, writing that this means that when the earth was still in chaos that there was "no prescribed mode of action" for planets, no path marked out for them and thus they could not transgress that path.²⁹ The writer agrees with Skinner that Paul's statement has implications in the moral world and even some possibly in the social world, but feels that Paul had no thought in mind of the physical world. This must be rejected on the basis of context: nowhere in Romans are there even hints to such a principle that the celestial bodies are obligated to stay in their orbits.

Is there then a distinction between sin and transgression? Certainly, by the very force of the Greek term. In some cases, there might not be any difference in the act which is committed; the significance

²⁷Hodge, op. cit., p. 190.

²⁸Godet, op. cit., p. 177.

²⁹Skinner, op. cit., pp. 296, 297.

can be seen in the standpoint from which the act is viewed. One act might be both παράβασις and ἁμαρτία, depending from which standpoint it is seen.

Conclusions

With the foregoing definitions of law and transgression, law being any or all divine principles or standards to which man is to conform, and transgression being in general the lack of conformity to those standards, we may now consider some conclusions about our text.

Paul's statement, "where there is no law, neither is there transgression," is a fact that he might have stated nearly any place in his epistle before the passage where it is stated. This negative statement would have been true and applicable. More obviously the positive counterpart, "Where there is law there is transgression," would have been more appropriate earlier. But the apostle chose to wait until the end of his argument on the world's lost condition. In one idea he discloses the principle on which he has based his arguments: man as a sinner breaks God's laws, God's wrath is incurred even in relation to the Mosaic law, and in fact God's wrath is bound to be evidenced more clearly whenever law exists, for it is only where there is no law that there is no law-breaking.

The question naturally arises then, where is there no law? Was there ever a time when at least some of God's divine standards were not in existence? Was there or is there ever a situation when these standards are not applicable?

The writer endorses Lenski's viewpoint:

But is there any place in all the sinful world where there is no law? where thus there is no transgression, and where no wrath follows? Has not Paul shown that even the pagans who have no special legal code are 'law to themselves,' with the works of God's own law written in their very hearts to their own condemnation (2:14-16)? Law---there is no place where it is not found, no place where it does not constantly reveal sin as transgression!....The thought that Paul means, where there is no law, there may be sin, but no transgression, is about the reverse of what he says, namely that no place exists here on earth where law is not present and does not reveal sin as what it really is, law transgression.³⁰

"...If we conceive a state in which the law should be altogether absent, whether written or unwritten (as in the brute creation), there would be no transgression whatever."³¹ Moule states that our text deals with ideal conditions. Since man's nature is depraved---regardless of how or why it became such---man can not restore himself to meet ideal standards.³²

³⁰Lenski, op. cit., p. 317.

³¹Henry Alford, The New Testament For English Readers (London: Rivingtons, 1872), II, 34.

³²Handley C. G. Moule, The Epistle Of St. Paul To The Romans (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1893), p. 121.

Obviously, if one understands law as Mosaic law, then the time that law existed not was all the time previous to Sinai. But notice that our text declares that where law does not exist there is no transgression. But when does or did transgression not exist? What saith the Scripture? Limiting our answer to the uses of the word "transgression" specifically, and excluding our text for logical reasons, one-half of the above mentioned six uses of παραβας concern us. Gal. 3:19 tells us that the law of Moses was added "because of transgressions," which must mean transgression already existed before Sinai. Rom. 5:14 speaks of "Adam's transgression," and 1 Tim. 2:14 records the transgression of Eve; certainly Adam and Eve sinned before the Sinai experience. Thus the interpretation that transgression never existed before God met Moses with the tablets must be rejected on clear Biblical usage. "they glorified him not as God," and they

Let it be granted in all fairness that the majority of those who hold to the Mosaic law view also hold that before it existed there was no transgression of it. (Although the text does not include these two latter words, it may be understood as implying them.) This is a sound statement which cannot be argued.

Let it also be understood that before Sinai there was transgression of principles contained in the Mosaic code. The moral law which is included in the

Mosaic law existed before Moses and exists today. "But all people in every dispensation are under the moral law of God. Moses did not originate this law and it did not cease with the cross."³³ It is fallacious to believe that God must have His will in black and white before He is justly able to hold men responsible. The second chapter of Romans speaks of Gentiles who have not the Mosaic law, who yet "show the work of the law written in their hearts." And those who sinned without the law also perished without it. In other words, those who died knowing nothing of Mosaic law as such were never condemned with the charge: "Thou art a transgressor of the Mosaic law!" But they could be charged with the transgression of the law in their hearts and with stepping aside ($\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma$) from what they knew to do---for they had knowledge of God yet glorified Him not as God. They "hindered the truth in unrighteousness," "they glorified him not as God," and they "changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things"; and they did this even when they clearly perceived God's "everlasting power and divinity"!

Their transgression is not dissimilar to that

³³Roy L. Aldrich, "Causes for Confusion of Law and Grace," Bibliotheca Sacra, CXVI (July 1959), p. 226.

of the Jew under the Mosaic code. For similarly, the Jew was also clearly told, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them; for I Jehovah thy God am a jealous God..." (Ex. 20:3-5b). In the face of this knowledge they defiantly fashioned the golden calf! Note well the similarities with the descent of the heathen into idolatry.

No, the heathen would not be unjustly accused by God of violation of the law of Moses, but they could be---and were---responsible for similar and even some identical laws. Immediately after the flood God said to Noah (Gen. 9:6): "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed..." How is that different which was given to Israel? "He that smiteth a man, so that he dieth, shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 21:12). Also, in Gen. 26:5 Jehovah speaks of "my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." Although these terms to us seem more appropriately related to Moses, they are here spoken of in reference to Abraham!

These examples should suffice to show logically that pre-Moses man did receive commands, laws, standards, ---and even some equal to Mosaic law---and that he did also transgress the laws he had. Many other examples

lie within the Scriptures. Thus, before Moses is not the place "where there is no law," and no transgression.

But let us continue with the question: Where is there no law? The importance and value of finding such a place is obvious because in that place there is no transgression. If there is such a place let us seek it and find it. "If a man could be placed in a situation without law, he would not be exposed to wrath as guilty; for as sin is the transgression of the law, so no transgression could be charged on him."³⁴

We are told that this place exists in Christ. In Christ there is no law and no transgression. Certainly the Scriptures testify that "Christ is the end of the law [of Moses] to everyone that believeth," (Rom. 10:4) and that Christians "are not under law but under grace," (Rom. 6:14) and that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). Positionally, when one believes on Christ he is transferred by the grace of God from being a transgressor of God's divine laws and thereby an object of God's wrath to a position in which his sins are remembered no more (Heb. 8:12; 10:17). "If we seek for freedom from transgression, we must search for it where

³⁴Robert Haldane, Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans (New York: Robert Carter, 1847), p. 178.

law is not."³⁵ The writer agrees with the believer's position in Christ being a place where there is no law and therefore no transgression positionally, but he also hurries to warn of the danger of concluding that the Christian is under obligation to no law and therefore never transgresses nor sins. Just as fast as the believer is removed from the law of sin and death he is placed in subjection to the law of Christ. Praise God, this is a change from burden and condemnation to privilege and eternal life; nevertheless the Christian does have responsibilities and can and does sin (1 Jno. 1:8).

Also some suggest that the place where there is no law and no transgression is in the case of infants and incompetent persons. That is, divine standards, principles, and laws are applicable only to morally responsible agents. Where law is applicable it can be and is broken, but where law cannot conceivably be applicable then of course neither is the charge of transgression applicable.

This view, too, appears to be plausible to the writer. (The writer is not overlooking the doctrine of the depravity of man; he is only stating that non-responsible agents do not transgress. Vindication from the guilt of the sin nature is a whole theological area

³⁵Henry J. Ripley, The Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Romans (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1859), p. 47.

in itself not dealt with as such in this paper.)

....Those who have no knowledge of law, i.e. no moral sense of any moral precept, cannot be transgressors. This is plainly and palpably the doctrine which he teaches; a doctrine which is sanctioned by the fundamental principles of our moral nature, and essential to the idea of right and wrong. In common cases, we never pronounce any man to be an offender against a moral law, unless he is an intelligent, rational, moral, free agent. Any one of these qualifications being found wanting, we absolve him from guilt. And does not Paul the same? But this does not settle the question when men begin to be such agents; for plainly they may be moral and free agents before they can read the Scriptures. The question as to the time when sinning begins, in each individual case can be settled only by Omniscience. Why should we not be content to leave it with the 'Judge of all the earth, WHO WILL DO RIGHT?'³⁶

Karl Barth's answer to "Where is there no law?" is unique, to say the least. In brief, he seems to hold that one must never be so brazen as to make definite, dogmatic statements about God nor one's personal relationship with God, for these would be based on "laws" laid down by men and would therefore be transgressions. The writer takes him to include any statement of a plan of salvation as a law and takes him to say that this sort of law works wrath. Barth implies that if one can maintain a freedom from any pragmatic road which supposedly leads to God he is in the way of faith, if he steps off this road he is in the way of law, and sin veritably will abound. Lest the writer be

³⁶Stuart, op. cit., p. 183.

accused of misrepresenting Barth, the latter's own words are quoted at length and the reader may form his own conclusion.

"In this context the word 'law' embraces all who set out to experience the infinite, all who venture upon its contemplation or description or representation. This is always transgression. Whenever men suppose themselves conscious of the emotion of nearness to God, whenever they speak and write of divine things, whenever they speak and write, whenever sermon-making and temple-building are thought of as an ultimate human occupation, whenever men are aware of divine appointment and of being entrusted with a divine mission, sin veritably abounds (v. 20)---unless of the miracle of forgiveness accompanies such activity; when, that is to say, the fear of the Lord maintains the distance by which God is separated from men (1. 22, 23 [note this distance!])....So long as religious as well as anti-religious activities fail to draw attention to that which lies beyond them, and so long as they attempt their own justification, either as faith, hope, and charity, or as the enthusiastic and dionysiac gestures of the anti-Christ, they are assuredly mere illusion. Everything which seeks to justify itself, whether by affirmation or by negation, is under the sentence of judgment. Those who believe in immanent reality should ponder well the words---the law worketh wrath....justification is by faith only. By faith in so far as law, the whole concrete visibility of human behavior does not condition and control it. By faith---in so far as faith, as a positive or negative experience in this world, is rid of all arrogance and aware of its own emptiness before the pure 'No' of God. By faith in so far as it stands on the critical line which divides the religiousus Luther from the religiousus Erasmus, and which separates the anti-religious Overbeck from the anti-religious Nietzsche; that is to say, in so far as faith is the relating of the whole content of human life to its eternal Origin and the awareness of the life which proceeds from death. If this invisible aspect of faith be paramount, transgression, affecting, as it does, its visible aspect, cannot be paramount. When therefore religion, or anti-religion is concerned to point beyond itself it loses its ambiguity, and absolute skepticism is deprived of all right...justification appears only

under the compulsion of the divine 'Nevertheless', in the recognition of the ever-recurring necessity of the forgiveness of sins, in a fearful and trembling consciousness that there is no human or pragmatic road which may be prolonged so far as to justify itself before God and man. Justification can be found only in the light of God's sincerity and of his irony."³⁷

The above quotation is given not because of its value in the interpretation of the text, but because (1) Barth's work is one of the very few volumes which deal with 4:15 at length, (2) This volume is well-received, and (3) in this day and age much significance accompanies the viewpoint of the father of neo-orthodoxy. This writer, almost needless to say, rejects the above interpretation on the grounds that it is out of context and contrary to Biblical doctrines. There is a dogmatic road by which all men may be justified; in fact, only by conforming to the Bible's plan of salvation can any man be justified.

³⁷Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (6th ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 136, 137.

It is only where law---divine commandment, principle, or obligation, written or unwritten, with its attached penalties and ultimate wrath---is absent or not applicable, that there can be no transgression---violation of a law or breach of a divine principle---charged against an individual. At no time in the history of the human race have divine law in some form or other, and transgression of it, been absent; only in the case of believers in Christ who positionally are justified and in the case of infants and mentally incompetent persons are the divine commandments with its penalties not applicable.

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