

Brief on St Paul and the Law

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All of St. Paul's teaching regarding the law must be considered

All of St. Paul's teachings regarding the law must be considered to understand his teachings regarding the law; which law is he speaking of (dogmatic law or non-dogmatic law), who are under the law, who is indebted to the law, and what is the purpose and effect of the law. A summary of St. Paul's teachings on the law are as follows:

- St. Paul teaches that faith and Old Testament rituals only forgave and covered sins and thus did not completely justify men and thus could not save them.
- St. Paul teaches that Old Testament rituals ended when Christ died on the cross and thus are no longer in force and hence are no longer necessary for salvation.
- St. Paul teaches that belief in the Christian faith and performance of the New Covenant rituals completely justifies and saves men by remitting their sins by sanctifying grace that Christ made available by Christ's sacrificial death.
- St. Paul teaches that the dogmatic law (which includes good works and avoiding sin) is still in force during the New Covenant era.
- St. Paul teaches that obeying dogmatic laws is necessary for salvation.
- However, St. Paul teaches that obeying dogmatic laws cannot justify or save anyone, only faith and sanctifying grace can justify and save men.
- While St. Paul teaches that the law cannot justify anyone, he teaches that once men are justified they must obey the dogmatic laws to be saved. Hence if they mortally violate a dogmatic law, they become un-justified and thus are on the road to damnation. "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." (Rom. 2:13)
- While St. Paul teaches that the law cannot justify anyone, he teaches that it can prevent a man from being justified if when he comes to the faith he does not also have contrition for his mortal sins. "If I should have all faith so that I could remove mountains and have not charity [such as due to lack of contrition for mortal sin], I am nothing." (1 Cor. 13:2)
- Hence while dogmatic laws cannot justify men, they can un-justify men or prevent them from being justified.
- St. Paul teaches that men who violate a dogmatic law and thus are guilty of voluntary sin are under the law because the law condemns them. Hence, men who are not guilty of voluntary sin are not under the dogmatic law because the law does not condemn them. Hence even though the dogmatic law is still in force, not everyone is under this law.
- St. Paul teaches that men whose sins are not remitted are indebted to the dogmatic law and thus are under the law in this sense, the law of death and banishment from heaven. Hence all the Old Testament elect were under the law in this sense because even though their sins were forgiven and covered they were not remitted until Christ died on the cross. Therefore even though the dogmatic law is still in force men who are *not* indebted to the law are not under the law, in this sense. For a man *not* to be indebted to the law, all of his sins must be remitted.

What law is St. Paul speaking of, dogmatic laws or non-dogmatic laws

There are two kinds of laws: laws that can never change, and laws that can change:

1. Dogmatic Laws: Dogmatic laws are laws that deal with faith or morals and can never change and thus can never be modified, abolished, dispensed of, or exempted from. The full deposit of the Catholic faith is all the infallibly defined dogmas regarding faith and morals.
2. Non-Dogmatic Laws: Non-dogmatic laws can change and thus be modified, abolished, dispensed of, or exempted from. Laws that can change are governmental laws, disciplinary laws, and rituals in the parts that do not deal with faith or morals.

St. Paul teaches that the dogmatic laws are still in force

Jesus Christ and St. Paul teach that the dogmatic laws are still in force during the New Covenant era and thus men must obey them to be saved.

Jesus Christ said,

“Do not think that I am come to destroy the [dogmatic] law, or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For amen I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot, or one tittle shall not pass of the law, till all be fulfilled.” (Mt. 5:17-18)

“If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” (Mt. 19:17)

St. Paul said,

“Do we, then, destroy the [dogmatic] law through faith? God forbid: but we establish the law.” (Rom. 3:31)

“For not the hearers of the [dogmatic] law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.” (Rom. 2:13)

Hence St. Paul’s teachings that seem to contradict this must be taken in correct context. For example,

“Wherefore by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified before him.” (Rom. 3:20)

St. Paul is not teaching that obeying the dogmatic law is not necessary for salvation but that obeying the dogmatic law only (which includes doing good works and avoiding sin) cannot justify anyone. However, once justified, men must keep the law to be saved. (See in this commentary, “The dogmatic law cannot forgive and remit sins,” p. [10](#).)

Therefore, any other teaching of St. Paul’s on the law that seems to contradict his teaching that the dogmatic law is still in force and obedience to it is necessary for salvation must be taken in correct context so as to not deny this basic dogma. The natural law alone tells men that they must obey laws or pay the consequences. The arch-heretic Martin Luther took St. Paul’s teachings on the law out of context to defend his infamous heresy that obedience to the dogmatic law is not necessary for salvation but only faith in Christ. St. Peter’s following words apply to Luther, as well as any heretic, who took St. Paul teachings out of context to defend a heresy:

“And account the longsuffering of our Lord, salvation; as also our most dear brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, hath written to you: As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are certain things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, brethren, knowing these things

before, take heed, lest being led aside by the error of the unwise, you fall from your own steadfastness.” (2 Pt. 3:15-17)

Indeed, some of St. Paul’s teachings are hard to be understood, so it is excusable as long as one’s misinterpretation does not teach a heresy. But woe to those who twist St. Paul’s teachings to defend a heresy.

St. Paul teaches that Old Testament rituals ended and did not remit sins

St. Paul taught that when Christ died on the cross, the Old Covenant ended and was replaced by the New Covenant.¹ And he taught that the Old Covenant and its rituals did not remit sins but only forgave and covered them.² Hence, when St. Paul teaches that the law is no longer in force and thus has ended, he is speaking of the Old Covenant and its rituals. And he teaches that this law, when it was in force, could not remit sins. For example,

“For the end of the law [the Old Covenant] is Christ, unto justice [complete justification by the remission of sins] to everyone that believeth.” (Rom. 10:4)

Therefore, St. Paul condemns the Judaizers; that is, nominal Christians who believed that the Old Covenant’s rituals were not only still in force (which was not heresy at that time as some faithful Christian Jews believed this) but that the Old Covenant rituals remitted sins and thus could save men, which is heresy.³ Hence, the Judaizers placed the Old Covenant and its rituals equal to or above the New Covenant and its rituals. In effect, the Judaizers nullified the New Covenant and its rituals as the only covenant and rituals that remits sins and saves men. Hence, they have in effect nullified the necessity of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to remit sins and save men.

It the following verses from Galatians 3, the law that St. Paul is speaking of is the Mosaic laws regarding discipline and ritual (particularly circumcision), but the same also applies to the laws regarding discipline and rituals given to Adam, Noe, and Abraham, for none of these laws could remit sins and thus save men. And not even dogmatic laws can remit sins and save men,⁴ but this is not the law St. Paul is speaking of in the following verses:

“O senseless Galatians, who hath bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you: Did you receive the Spirit [of Christ, the New Covenant, and sanctifying grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit by baptism] by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish, that, whereas you began in the Spirit, you would now be made perfect by the flesh [the Mosaic laws, in particular circumcision]?” (Gal. 3:1-3)

“Why then was the law [the Mosaic disciplinary and ritual laws]? It was set because of transgressions [to forgive and cover sins but not remit them], until the seed [the Messiah, Jesus Christ] should come to whom he made the promise, being ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not of one; but God is one. Was the law then against the promises of God? God forbid. For if there had been a law given which could give life, verily justice should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin [the sin debt] that the promise by the faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before the faith came we were kept under the law [the Old Covenant and Mosaic rituals] shut up unto that faith which was to be revealed. Wherefore the law was our pedagogue in Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after the faith is come, we are no longer under a pedagogue [no longer under the Old Covenant]. For you are all the children of God

¹ See Long Commentaries: The New Covenant replaced the Old Covenant, p. ##.

² See Long Commentaries: The Old Testament elect’s sins were covered but not remitted, p. ##.

³ See Long Commentaries: Legitimate vs. illegitimate dispute regarding Mosaic laws, p. ##.

⁴ See in this commentary, “The dogmatic law cannot forgive and remit sins,” p. 10.

by faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ.” (Gal. 3:19-27)

Therefore, the Old Testament rituals such as circumcision and the animal sacrifices are no longer in force and no longer necessary. The animal sacrifices were only able to forgive and cover sins but not remit. It is faith in Christ that remits sins and saves men. Therefore, St. Paul teaches that so-called Christians who believe that circumcision is in force and can remit sins and save men have gone backward and “are made void of Christ”:

“Stand fast, and be not held again under the yoke of bondage [of the Old Covenant]. Behold, I Paul tell you, that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man circumcising himself, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. You are made void of Christ, you who are justified in the law [the Old Covenant]: you are fallen from grace.” (Gal. 5:1-4)

St. Paul says that if the Old Testament’s laws could completely justify men and thus remit their sins and save them, then there would be no need for Christ’s sacrificial death and the New Covenant; and thus Christ died in vain:

“I cast not away the grace of God. For if justice be by the law [the Old Testament’s dogmatic, disciplinary, and ritual laws], then Christ died in vain.” (Gal. 2:21)

Hence, St. Paul teaches that Judaizers nullified the promise given to Abraham that one of his seed, the Messiah, would come and remit sins and save men, not the Mosaic law, or any other law. While the Mosaic law had more laws than were given to Abraham, these laws could not remit sins and save men, as these Judaizers proposed and thus treated the Mosaic law as if it were the promised seed, the Messiah. Hence St. Paul teaches that the Mosaic law did not nullify nor fulfill the promise given to Abraham:

“To Abraham were the promises made and to his seed. He saith not, And to his seeds as of many, but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ. Now this I say: that the covenant which was previously confirmed by God [with Abraham], the [Mosaic] law which was four hundred and thirty years after cannot set it aside and nullify the promise. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise. But God gave it to Abraham by promise.” (Gal. 3:16-18)

The promised seed, then, is Jesus Christ. He is the one, not the law or any other person, who redeemed men by his sacrificial death which made possible the remission of sins and thus the salvation of men. Therefore, St. Paul teaches that the Judaizers who believed that Old Testament rituals can remit sins and save men are still under the curse of the dogmatic law (which is the sin debt caused by inherited original sin and by violating dogmatic laws) because the Old Testament rituals could not remit sins and thus pay the sin debt.

It was Christ’s sacrificial death that freed men from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for men. It was Christ who took the sin debt upon himself by dying for our sins. St. Paul says,

“For on your account, he hath made him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin that we might by him become the righteousness of God [become completely justified].” (2 Cor. 5:21)

St. Paul teaches that Christ paid the sin debt for men while hanging upon the holy cross, made of wood, and dying for our sins. And thus he redeemed men from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us:

“For as many as are of the works of the law [the Old Testament’s disciplinary, ritual, and dogmatic laws] are under a curse. For it is written: Cursed is every one that abideth not in all things [by violating dogmatic laws] which are written in the book of the law to do them... But...Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law [the sin debt], being made a curse for us: for it is written: Cursed is every one

that hangeth on a tree, that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, that we may receive the promise of the Spirit [sanctifying grace] by [the Christian] faith.” (Gal. 3:13-14)

It was Christ’s sacrificial death, then, that paid the sin debt for men while hanging upon the holy cross, made of wood, and dying for our sins. Therefore, Judaizers who believed they could have their sins remitted and thus be saved by the Old law were still under the curse (the sin debt).

When St. Paul says “Cursed is every one that abideth not in all things [by violating dogmatic laws] which are written in the book of the law to do them,” he means that so many of God’s chosen people commit mortal sins that it is said that no one keeps the law. Yet we know some men have not committed mortal sins, such as St. Joseph and St. Anne.⁵ Nevertheless, most men commit mortal sins and thus have a sin debt in this regard:

“Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law?” (Jn. 7:19)

“The Lord hath looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there be any that understand and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are become unprofitable together: there is none that doth good, no not one.” (Ps. 13:2-3)

“And we are all become as one unclean, and all our justices as the rag of a menstruous woman: and we have all fallen as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. There is none that calleth upon thy name: that riseth up, and taketh hold of thee: thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast crushed us in the hand of our iniquity.” (Isa. 64:6-7)

And most men commit mortal sins during the New Covenant era also:

“How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life: and few there are that find it!” (Mt. 7:14)

“Yet the Son of man when he cometh, shall he find, think you, faith on earth?” (Lk. 18:8)

Men who were never guilty of voluntary sin are still guilty of original sin, which was a voluntary sin of Adam and Eve that all men (except Jesus and Mary) inherit. Thus all men guilty of original sin (such as St. Joseph and St. Anne) are also under a sin debt and thus under the curse of the law in this regard as well, by way of original sin:

“Wherefore as by one man [Adam] sin entered into this world and by sin death; and so death passed upon all men in whom all have sinned.” (Rom. 5:12)

Hence Christ was made a curse and died on the cross to remove the curse men were under because of their sin debt due to the guilt of original sin and voluntary sin.

Who does St. Paul say is under the dogmatic law

Men can be under the dogmatic law in two ways: 1) by the guilt of voluntary sin or 2) by the sin debt incurred by unremitted sins.

Men guilty of voluntary sin are under the law

Regarding dogmatic laws, which thus are always in force, St. Paul teaches that only men who violate these laws are under these laws and thus subject to them because they are condemned by the law. Men who violate dogmatic laws are always condemned and punished by God and should be condemned and punished by men if possible.

⁵ See commentaries on Ps. 13:1 and Rom. 3:23.

If all men kept the dogmatic laws there would be no need for written laws to remind, warn, condemn, and punish them. Therefore, men who do not violate dogmatic laws are not condemned by the law and thus, in this sense, are not under these laws, as their will is conformed to keeping these laws.⁶ Take the following examples.

- Signs (laws) enforcing speed limits are placed on highways to let drivers know how fast they can go. A driver who is set on keeping these laws, such as by driving no faster than 75 miles per hour, drives no faster than that naturally, by instinct, and thus does not need the sign (the law) to warn and remind him. Hence the law will not condemn and punish him as long as he does not drive faster than 75 mph. If he drives faster than 75 mph, he then falls back under the power of the law and gets condemned and punished.
- A child with use of reason can obey the law of not murdering or stealing without ever hearing or reading the written law that condemns these things. While the law is still in force, he is not under the law, not subject to the law, because he is not violating it.
- Before Adam and Eve fell, they were not only perfect and holy and obeyed the law naturally, but they also did not even know what sin was, such as murder and homosexuality. Hence, they were not only not under these laws but these laws did not even exist at that time in written form because there was no need for them. Only after they sinned, by disobeying God, did other sins enter the world.

Therefore, men who naturally do not violate dogmatic laws do not need the written law to remind, warn, condemn, and punish them. This is what St. Paul means when he says,

“Knowing this, that the law is not made for the just man, but for the unjust and disobedient, for the ungodly, and for sinners, for the wicked and defiled, for murderers of fathers, and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,” (1 Tim. 1:9)

“But if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are fornication, uncleanness, immodesty, luxury, idolatry, witchcrafts, enmities, contentions, emulations, wraths, quarrels, dissensions, sects, envies, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like. Of the which I foretell you, as I have foretold to you, that they who do such things shall not obtain the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is, charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity. Against such there is no law.” (Gal. 5:18-23)

“For the law worketh wrath. For where there is no law [no need of the written law to be reminded of the law], neither is there transgression.” (Rom. 4:15)

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of iniquity unto sin; but present yourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of justice unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you; for you are not under the law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know you not, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are whom you obey, whether it be of sin unto death, or of obedience unto justice. But thanks be to God, that you were the servants of sin, but have obeyed from the heart, unto that form of doctrine, into which you have been delivered. Being then freed from sin, we have been made

⁶ A member of the Catholic Church who is guilty of sin is condemned by the law and thus is under the law. If he worthily confesses his sin and thus his sin is remitted, he is no longer condemned by the law and so is no longer under the law. However, he will still be punished for sin, which is known as the punishment due to his sin.

servants of justice... For when you were the servants of sin, you were free men to justice... But now being made free from sin and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end life everlasting. For the wages of sin is death. But the grace of God, life everlasting, in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 6:12-23)

Therefore, men who sin against the dogmatic law are servants of sin and thus of the Devil unto death and thus are under the law, condemned for violating it:

“Jesus answered them: Amen, amen I say unto you: that whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin.” (Jn. 8:34)

St. John says, “He that committeth sin is of the devil.” (1 Jn. 3:8)

But men who obey the law and thus do not sin are servants of justice and thus of Christ unto life. So in this sense they are not under the law because they incur no condemnation and penalty for violating the law. St. Paul says that the dogmatic law is dead to them:

“For I, through the [dogmatic] law am dead to the law, that I may live to God, with Christ I am nailed to the cross.” (Gal. 2:19)

But if he sins he falls back under the law and hence the law is no longer dead to him while he is dead to Christ:

“But if while we seek to be justified in Christ we ourselves also are found sinners; is Christ then the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build up again the things which I have destroyed, I make myself a prevaricator.” (Gal. 2:17-18)

What follows is a commentary from the Ambrosiaster:

Ambrosiaster, 4th century, On Romans 6:14: “If we walk according to the commandments which God gives, St. Paul says that sin will not rule over us, for it rules over those who sin. If we do not walk as God commands, we are under the law; but if we do not sin, we are not under the law but under grace. If, however, we sin, we fall back under the law, and sin starts to rule over us once more, for every sinner is a slave to sin. It is necessary for every person to be under the law as long as he does not receive forgiveness, for by the law’s authority sin makes the sinner guilty. Thus the person to whom forgiveness is given and who keeps it by not sinning anymore will neither be ruled by sin or be under the [dogmatic] law. For the authority of the law no longer applies to him; he has been delivered from sin. Those whom the law holds guilty have been turned over to it by sin. Therefore the person who has departed from sin cannot be under the law.”

Ambrosiaster, 4th century, On Romans 7: “For to die to the law is to live to God, since the law rules over sinners. Therefore the one whose sins are forgiven dies to the law; this is what it means to be set free from the law... We are set free from the law when we receive the forgiveness of sins. It has no power over us, but controls only unbelievers and sinners.”

Men indebted to the law are under the law

Men who are guilty of voluntary sin are under the law in two ways: 1) because they are condemned by the law by their own fault (as mentioned in the last section) and 2) because they are indebted to the law because their sin has not been remitted. Men guilty of original sin are also indebted to the law.

Men whose sins are not remitted are indebted to the law and in this sense are under law, the dogmatic law on faith and morals. Sins were not remitted until Christ died on the cross. Hence, during the Old Testament era the sins of believers who confessed were forgiven and covered but

not remitted. They still had the sin debt and thus they were not completely justified. Therefore, when the Old Testament elect died they could not enter heaven because their sin debt was not yet paid. Instead, they went to the highest level of hell called the Limbo of the Fathers which was a very beautiful and peaceful place. However, they were still under the law of death. It was Christ's sacrificial death that conquered death and thus remitted their sins and opened the gates of heaven to them:

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written: Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:” (Gal. 3:13)

“[Jesus Christ] is on the right hand of God, swallowing down death, that we might be made heirs of life everlasting: being gone into heaven, the angels and powers and virtues being made subject to him.” (1 Pt. 3:22)

“O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? Now the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 15:55-57)

Ambrosiaster, 4th century, Commentary of Rom. 7:4: “Thus it happens that all who believe in Christ are delivered from the law [the sin debt] because sin has been condemned [remitted]. For sin, which is the devil, has been conquered by the body of Christ..., thereby destroying the penalty [the sin debt] which had been decreed because of the sin of Adam... Now he has no authority over those who belong to Christ [who thus have no sin debt], by whom he has been conquered.”

Hence, even the holiest of saints such as Abraham, Moses, Job, St. Anne, and St. Joseph were indebted to the law and thus under the law of death until their sin debt was paid when Christ died on the cross. His sacrificial death caused their covered sins to be remitted which enabled them to enter heaven. Therefore, the Old Testament elect whose sins were forgiven and covered were still indebted to the law and thus under the law in this sense because their sin debt was not yet paid.

“For the law of the spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath delivered me from the law of sin and of death [the sin debt by remitting sins]. For what the [old] law could not do [remit sins and thus pay the sin debt] in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and of sin hath condemned sin [the sin debt by remitting sins] in the flesh.” (Rom. 8:2-3)

During the Old Testament era then, faith in God and the Old Testament rituals forgave and covered sins but did not remit sins. Therefore, even the elect were under the curse of death because their sin debt was not yet paid and thus their sins were not remitted. It was Christ who lifted this curse (which neither the Old Law nor any other law could do) when he died on the cross.⁷

During the New Covenant era all men who are guilty of sin (original sin or voluntary sin) are also indebted to the law and thus under the law in two ways; 1) by the guilt of voluntary sin or original sin, and 2) by the sin debt, which can only be remitted by getting baptized into the Catholic Church if they are un-baptized or by worthily confessing their sins if they are members of the Catholic Church, for there is no remission of sins outside the Catholic Church.

⁷ See in this commentary, “St. Paul teaches that Old Testament rituals ended and did not remit sins,” p. 4.

What does St. Paul say is the purpose and effect of the dogmatic law

The dogmatic law condemns and punishes sinners and rewards the just

The purpose of the dogmatic law is to make men aware of what they must do to be justified and thus be saved. The effect of the law is to condemn and punish men who violate it and reward men who keep it. The reward men get for keeping a dogmatic law is to move them closer to God if they are unbelievers or believers in mortal sin, or to increase in holiness if they are believers in a state of grace.

The dogmatic law cannot forgive and remit sins

While the dogmatic law condemns and punishes sinners and rewards the just, it cannot justify and save men. St. Paul teaches that the law gives men the knowledge of sin and thus the knowledge that they are guilty if they violate it but it does not justify them. It does not forgive or remit their sin:

“Wherefore by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified before him. For by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Rom. 3:20)

Ambrosiaster, 4th century, On Romans 7:5: “Paul says that the sins which rule over those who commit them in the flesh are revealed by the law; they are not caused by the law. For the law is the measure of sin, not its cause, and it makes sinners guilty.”

“But knowing that man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ; we also believe in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: because by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” (Gal. 2:16)

It is a man’s sincere faith in the true God, which God sees and then bestows upon him a special grace that justifies him. It is this special grace that forgives and remits sins. This special grace during the Old Testament era forgave and covered sins and can be called covering grace. Whereas, the special grace during the New Covenant era that forgives and remits sins is called sanctifying grace and can be called remitting grace.⁸ Sanctifying grace was made available to men when Christ redeemed men by his sacrificial death. St. Paul says that faith and this special grace, and not the law which includes good works and avoiding sin, justifies men:

“For by grace you are saved through faith and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God, not of works, that no man may glory.” (Eph. 2:8-9)

No man may glory because there is no work a human creature could do to cover or remit his sins, only faith in God and his special grace covers and remits sins. King David says,

“No brother can redeem, nor shall man redeem; he shall not give to God his ransom, nor the price of the redemption of his soul; and shall labour forever... But God will redeem my soul from the hand of hell when he shall receive me.” (Ps. 48:8-9, 16)

The infallible Council of Orange teaches the following:

Council of Orange, 529: “Canon 19. That no one is saved except by God’s mercy. Even if human nature remained in that integrity in which it was formed, it would in no way save itself without the help of its Creator; therefore, since without the grace

⁸ Men even need God’s grace to desire and make an act of faith. But this grace is not covering or sanctifying grace. It is assisting grace. Men cannot desire and do anything good with a good motive without God’s assisting grace. Hence men need this grace to sincerely desire and then embrace the faith. Assisting grace goes before and during the desire and act. But this grace does not forgive or remit sins.

of God it cannot guard the health which it received, how without the grace of God will it be able to recover what it has lost?”⁹

While the law cannot forgive and remit sins and thus cannot justify and save men, it can un-justify them or prevent them from being justified.

The dogmatic law can un-justify a man

While the dogmatic law cannot forgive and remit sins and thus cannot justify and save men, it can cause a justified man to become unjustified if he violates the law. Hence, while obedience to the law cannot justify men, disobedience to the law can un-justify men. While faith and not the law justifies a man, faith and the obedience to the law is necessary to remain justified. Therefore, once men are justified they must keep the law (which includes doing good works and avoiding sins) in order to remain justified. For example, when God created Adam and Eve, they were perfect and holy and by no work of their own because they did not exist before God created them. Yet, after they were created they had keep faith in God and obey his laws or else they would lose their justification.

With these truths in mind, we can correctly interpret the Bible’s teaching on grace, the purpose and effect of the law, and faith.

In the following verses, St. Paul teaches that men are justified and thus become believers by faith and not by the law, not by any works that they did:

“Where is then thy boasting? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we account a man to be justified by faith, without the works of the law.” (Rom. 3:27-28)

He teaches this in regard to Abraham:

“What shall we say then that Abraham hath found, who is our father according to the flesh. For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was reputed to him unto justice.” (Rom. 4:1-3)

St. Paul is taking about Abraham when he found God. Hence, he is speaking about the works Abraham did before he found God and thus before he was justified. No matter how many good works Abraham did before he knew God and before he had faith in God, these works could not justify him.¹⁰ He needed to have knowledge of God and faith in God to be justified. St. Paul says,

“Faith then cometh by hearing.” (Rom. 10:17) “In him every one that believeth, is justified.” (Acts 13:39)

However, the good works Abraham did before he knew God and thus before he was justified earned him the knowledge and assisting grace of God that enabled him to believe in God and make an act of faith in God, which then justified him by God’s covering grace.

But once Abraham believed in God, he needed to obey the law and thus do good works and avoid sins in order to remain justified. His good works and avoidance of sin confirmed his faith and enabled him to remain justified. This is what St. James means when he says,

“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, offering up Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou that faith did cooperate with his works; and by works faith was made perfect?” (Jam. 2:20-22)

⁹ Ended under Pope Felix III and confirmed by Pope Boniface II; D. 192.

¹⁰ See in this article “Romans 4:1-8,” p. [15](#).

Abraham was already a believer and justified when he offered up Isaac; so his work of offering up Isaac did not justify him but instead confirmed and enabled him to remain justified and confirmed and perfected his faith and thus he became holier than he was before. Hence St. James statement that “Abraham...was justified by works” (Ja. 2:20) does not contradict St. Paul’s following words when taken in correct context: “We therefore conclude, that it is by faith a man is justified and not by the works of the law. (Rom. 3:28). St. James is speaking of the necessity of a justified man (Abraham) to do works in order to confirm and maintain his justification. Whereas St. Paul is speaking of an unjustified man (Abraham when he was an unbeliever) who can only be justified by faith and thus not by the law, not by works. This is proved elsewhere when St. Paul speaks to believers and tells them that they must keep the law in order to be just. This means that if they keep the law they will remain justified but if they violate it they will lose their justification:

“For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.” (Rom. 2:13)

If St. Paul’s words are not taken in the correct context it can seem that he contradicts himself when he says “the doers of the law shall be justified” (Rom. 2:13), as opposed to when he says “that it is by faith a man is justified and not by the works of the law.” (Rom. 3:28). In the former case, St. Paul is speaking about believers who are already justified, while in the latter case about those who are not justified and then become justified by faith. With both of his teachings considered, St. Paul teaches that whereas the law cannot justify a man, it can un-justify him. Hence, in Rom. 2:13 St. Paul teaches that a believer who does not keep the law (which includes good works and avoiding sin) will lose his justification and thus be in a state of damnation: “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.” (Rom. 2:13)

Therefore, St. Paul is not teaching that the law is not necessary for salvation but only that the law cannot justify anyone. However, once justified, men must keep the law to remain justified and be saved. After all, this is what St. Paul’s master, Jesus Christ, teaches. When speaking to believers and thus those who are already justified, Jesus says the following:

“If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” (Mt. 19:17)

Hence Jesus teaches that the laws regarding faith and morals (dogmatic laws) are still in force during the New Covenant era and thus are not abolished and are necessary for salvation:

“Do not think that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For amen I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot, or one tittle shall not pass of the law, till all be fulfilled.” (Mt. 5:17-18)

And echoing this, St. Paul says,

“Do we, then, destroy the [dogmatic] law through faith? God forbid: but we establish the law.” (Rom. 3:31)

The dogmatic law can prevent a man from being justified

St. Paul teaches that to be justified a man must not only have faith but must also have contrition for his mortal sins. Contrition includes sorrow for sin and a firm purpose of amendment. A man who has faith is prevented from being justified if he lacks contrition for his mortal sins because he does not have charity:

“For this is the charity of God, that we keep his commandments.” (1 Jn. 5:3)

St. Paul teaches that men who have faith but do not have charity are nothing and thus cannot be justified:

“And if I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.” (1 Cor. 13:2)

Charity is the love of God. Men who do not have contrition for their sins do not truly love God and thus do not have charity:

“He that committeth sin is of the devil.” (1 Jn. 3:8)

“For this is the charity of God, that we keep his commandments.” (1 Jn. 5:3)

“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them; he it is that loveth me... Jesus answered, and said to him: If any one love me, he will keep my word... He that loveth me not, keepeth not my words. (Jn. 14:21, 23-24)

Therefore, unbaptized men who believe in the Catholic faith but do not have contrition for their sins are unworthy candidates for baptism because they do not have charity, which is the love of God. They must not be baptized even if they are in danger of death. If they do get baptized, they receive the indelible mark and membership in the Catholic Church because they have the Catholic faith, but they do not get sanctifying grace. Thus their sins and the punishment due to their sins are not remitted until they worthily confess their sins to a Catholic priest,¹¹ which includes what they were lacking, contrition for their sins. They will then get the remission of all their sins and the punishment due to their sins by the sanctifying grace of baptism. Even though the *The Catechism of Christian Doctrine* contains heresies and Pius X who approved it was an apostate antipope, they teach the truth in this regard:

The Catechism of Christian Doctrine (aka *Catechism of Pius X*), 1912:

“14 Q. When the person who is being baptised is an adult, what dispositions should he have? A. An adult who is being baptised, besides faith, should have at least imperfect contrition for the mortal sins he may have committed.

“15 Q. If an adult in mortal sin was baptised without such sorrow, what would he receive? A. If an adult was baptised in mortal sin without such sorrow he would receive the character of Baptism and membership in the Catholic Church but not the remission of his sins nor sanctifying grace. And these two effects would be suspended, until the obstacle is removed by the sacrament of Penance.”

Members of the Catholic Church, who thus have the Catholic faith, must also have contrition for their sins or else they cannot be remitted even when they confess them to a priest and receive absolution. If their sins are mortal, then they cannot be justified because they do not have charity.

Romans 7:1-13

The sin debt, old law, and new law

“Know you not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the [Old Covenant] law,) that the law hath dominion over a man as long as it liveth? For the woman that hath an husband, whilst her husband liveth is bound to the law. But if her husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. Therefore, whilst her husband liveth, she shall be called an adulteress, if she be with another man: but if her husband be dead, she is delivered from the law of her husband; so that she is not an adulteress, if she be with another man.” (Rom. 7:1-3)

¹¹ If a Catholic priest is not available in the foreseeable future, the faithful must confess their sins directly to God and he will remit them.

Therefore, when Christ died, the old law (the Old Covenant and its rituals) ended and the new law began (the New Covenant and its rituals):

“Therefore, my brethren, you also are become dead to the [Old Covenant] law, by the body of Christ [by Christ’s sacrificial death which ended the Old Covenant and replaced it with the New Covenant and created the Catholic Church]; that you may belong to another, who is risen again from the dead, that we may bring forth fruit to God.” (Rom. 7:4)

Under the New Covenant, the faithful who are in a state of grace no longer have the sin debt because their sins are remitted by Christ. They are no longer under the law of Moses and the Old Covenant. Instead, they are under the law of Christ who paid the sin debt and thus remitted their sins. The faithful, then, are members of another Church, to the Catholic Church and no longer of the synagogue.

The following verses teach that the old law could not remit the sins of men but could only cover them. Thus their sin debt remained and therefore men during the Old Testament era were under the law of death:

“For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins, which were by the [violation of the dogmatic] law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death [, not only by the guilt of the sin which could be forgiven and covered, but also the sin debt which could only be remitted by Christ,]. But now we are loosed from the [Old Covenant] law, dead to that which held us captive [by the sin debt, and thus the Old Testament elect could not go to heaven when they died but went to the Limbo of the Fathers], so that we serve not under the old written code [the Old Covenant that only promised the remission of sins] but in the new life of the Spirit [the New Covenant which remits sins and completely justifies souls by sanctifying grace bestowed in souls by the Holy Spirit].” (Rom. 7:5-6)

The law makes men aware of their sins and tempts rebellious men to violate it

When men keep the natural law, there is no need for the written law to warn, condemn, and punish them. That does not mean that men who do not have the written law are not guilty of sin when they violate the natural law. They are! This is what St. Paul means when he says,

“For whosoever have sinned without the [written] law, shall perish without the law [because they violated the natural law]; and whosoever have sinned in the [written] law, shall be judged by the [written] law.” (Rom. 2:12)

“For when the Gentiles, who have not the [written] law, do by nature those things that are of the law [by the natural law]; these having not the [written] law are a law to themselves [by the natural law].” (Rom. 2:14)

Furthermore, as you will read below, St. Paul, in Rom. 7:13, teaches that those who violate the written law are doubly guilty for violating the natural law and the written law. Here is commentary of Rom. 2:12:

Catholic Commentary, Rom. 2:12. **Whosoever sinned without the law:** “That is, without the written law of Moses, against their reason and conscience, against the natural law. And also those who being Jews, have sinned under this written law, shall be judged even with greater severity for having transgressed against the written law.”

St. Paul teaches that some men who sin against the natural law are so obstinate that they do not know it is a sin anymore. Hence they hardened their hearts and thus their conscience. In his mercy, God gives some of these men the written law, such as the Ten Commandments, so that

they no longer hide their sins from themselves and must confront them, at which point there is hope for them to repent.

But because most fallen men are rebellious, the written law incites their rebelliousness and thus they violate the written law simply because someone or some law told them what they must do or not do. All this St. Paul teaches in Romans 7:7-13, when considering all the verses. In these verses, St. Paul speaks for mankind and not for himself. This is evident because in verse 9 he says “I lived some time without the law,” but there was no time that St. Paul lived without the law because he was born into the law and lived as a Pharisee:

“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other thinketh he may have confidence in the flesh, I more, Being circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; according to the law, a Pharisee:” (Phili. 3:4-5)

“And my life indeed from my youth, which was from the beginning among my own nation in Jerusalem, all the Jews do know: Having known me from the beginning (if they will give testimony) that according to the most sure sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.” (Acts 26:4-5)

And in Rom. 7: 10, 11, and 13, he says he committed the sin of covetousness unto death and thus a mortal sin. Yet we know that St. Paul was not guilty of mortal sins against morals but against the faith for denying Christ. Another example is Queen Esther. In the following verses, Queen Esther speaks for her sinful people and not for herself because she did not worship false gods, even though she used the word “we”:

“We have sinned in thy sight, and therefore thou hast delivered us into the hands of our enemies: For we have worshipped their gods. Thou art just, O Lord.” (Est. 14:6-7)

In regards to Romans 7:7-13, St. Augustine says,

St. Augustine, *Letter 37*, to Simplician, First Question, 397: “1.1. ...In this text it seems to me that the apostle [St. Paul] has put himself in the place of someone who is under the law, whose words he speaks in his own person.”

Hence, in Romans 7:7-13, St. Paul speaks for mankind and not for himself:

“What shall we say, then? Is the [dogmatic] law sin? God forbid. But I do not know sin, but by the law; for I had not known concupiscence, if the law did not say: Thou shalt not covet. But sin taking occasion by the commandment wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.” (Rom. 7:7-8)

St. Paul did not say “I did not sin,” but “I do not know sin”:

St. Augustine, *Letter 37*, to Simplician, First Question, 397: “1.2. This is why it must be understood that the law was given not that sin might be instilled nor that it might be extirpated [forgiven] but only that it might be made manifest... And so he does not say, ‘I did not commit sin except through the law,’ but, *I did not know sin except through the law*. Nor, again, does he say, ‘For I did not have covetousness except that the law said, You shall not covet,’ but, *did not know about covetousness except that the law said, You shall not covet*. From this it is clear that covetousness was not instilled by the law but made manifest by it.”¹²

Hence, when St. Paul says, “I do not know sin but by the law,” he means the hard hearted man who no longer knew his sin was sin until the written law was made manifest to him:”

“There is a way that seemeth to a man right: and the ends thereof lead to death.” (Prv. 16:25) “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not

¹² First Question, 1,2.

washed from their filthiness.” (Prv. 30:12) “For I am not conscious to myself of anything, yet I am not hereby justified.” (1 Cor. 4:4)

Hence, when St. Paul says “without the law sin was dead” (Rom. 7:8), he means hidden and buried in his heart. This is made clear in the following verses:

“And I lived some time without the [written] law. But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” (Rom. 7:9)

Therefore, if the written law revived his sin, then his sin was alive before the written law only he did not know it was sin because of his hardened heart. When he says “I died” he means that he now knows that he is in a state of damnation.

“And the commandment that was ordained to life, the same was found to be unto death to me. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, seduced me, and by it killed me.” (Rom. 7:10-11)

The written law seduced him by forcing him to confront his sin that he was hiding in his heart. The written law brings joy to those who were keeping it by obeying the natural law and sadness and hopefully repentance to those who were violating it by violating the natural law. To the former it confirms them in life but to the latter it makes them aware that they are dead, in a state of damnation:

“Wherefore the law indeed is holy and the commandment holy and just and good. Was that then which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it may appear sin, by that which is good, wrought death in me; that sin, by the commandment, might become sinful above measure.” (Rom. 7:12-13)

Here St. Paul clearly teaches that the written law made manifest the sin that he was hiding in his heart so that it “may appear as sin.” He did not say that it “may be sin.” This man, then, now knows that he is dead, in a state of damnation, and not only for violating the natural law but now for violating the written law, at which point he became “sinful above measure” and thus doubly guilty; sinful when he violated the natural law and sinful when he violated the written law.

Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, 1998, Commentary on Romans 7:7-13: “Overview: The law revealed to us that desires that we previously supposed were innocent were in fact culpable. Covetousness is a case in point. Before the law came, people were living in a fool’s paradise, imagining that everything was all right. But when the law arrived they became aware of how wrong their previous actions had been. In itself the law is holy and shows us what God expects of us. But because we are sinful, the effect of this is the opposite of the one intended. The devil makes use of this and incites us to sin by transgressing the commandment. The Fathers were well aware of the psychological tendency to find in the commandments of the law a prod to disobedience, and they did not hesitate to bring out this aspect of the matter whenever they could. The law cannot cause death by itself, because it is spiritual by nature. Rather, it is our sin which does this, because we are sinful by our fallen nature. The law makes our sin worse because it makes it more obvious.”¹³

In Romans 5, St. Paul teaches the same as in Roman 7, that before the written law was given to Moses (the Ten Commandments) sin was nevertheless in the world even though it was not accounted as sin and hence death reigned from Adam to Moses:

“For until the [Mosaic] law, sin, although it was in the world, was not accounted sin, because there was no law. But death reigned from Adam unto Moses.” (Rom. 5:13-14)

¹³ Edited by Gerald Bray. Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1998. New Testament, vol. vi, Romans 7:7-13, P. 181.

What follows is a commentary on Roman 7 by St. Augustine:

St. Augustine, *Letter 37*, to Simplician, First Question, 397: “1.4. To this he adds, *For without the law sin was dead* (Rom 7:8). It was as though he said that it was hidden—that is, it was thought to be dead. Shortly thereafter he says more clearly, *But once I lived without the law* (Rom 7:9)—that is, I was unafraid of death from sin because it had not appeared when there was no law. *But with the coming of the commandment sin came back to life* (Rom 7:9)—that is, it made its appearance. *But I died* (Rom 7:10)—that is, I knew that I was dead for the reason that the guilt of transgression threatens me with the certain punishment of death... For unless [sin] was once alive it cannot come back to life. But it was dead—that is, hidden—when mortal men who were born without the law’s commandment lived in pursuit of the covetous desires of the flesh without any knowledge, because there was no prohibition. Therefore he says, *Once I lived without the law... But I died, and the commandment, which was for life, turned out to be death for me.* (Rom 7:9-10) For if one is obedient to the commandment, life is certainly there. But it turns out to be death as long as the commandment is contravened, so that it not only becomes sin, which was committed even before the commandment, but becomes it in a more widespread and pernicious fashion, such that sin is now committed by a knowing transgressor...

“1.6. *And so, to be sure, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good* (Rom 7:12), for it enjoins what should be enjoined and prohibits what should be prohibited. *Has, then, what is good become death for me? Of course not!* (Rom 7:13) There is vice in using a thing badly, not in the commandment itself, which is good, *because the law is good if a person uses it lawfully* (1 Tim 1:8). But a person uses the law badly if he does not submit to God with devout humility so that the law may be fulfilled through grace. And so, he who does not use it lawfully receives it for no other purpose than that his sin, which before its prohibition lay hidden, may begin to appear through transgression, and to appear without limit, because now it is not only a matter of committing sin but also of contravening the commandment. He continues, therefore, and adds, *But sin, in order to appear as sin, worked death in me through what was good, so that the sinner and the sin might, thanks to the commandment, be without limit* (Rom 7:13). From this it is evident what he meant when he said previously, *For without the law sin was dead*, not because it did not exist but because it was not manifest, and how it was said, *Sin came back to life*, not that it might be just what it was before the law but that it might be made manifest inasmuch as it contravened the law, since he says in this place, *But sin, in order to appear as sin, worked death in me through what was good*; for he does not say “in order to be sin” but in order to appear as sin.

“1.7. Then he gives the reason why this is so: *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am fleshly* (Rom 7:14). In saying this he clearly indicates that the law cannot be fulfilled except by spiritual persons, who do not become such apart from grace. For a person becomes that much more conformed to the spiritual law—that is, he rises all the more to a spiritual disposition—the more he fulfills it, because he takes that much more delight in it when he is no longer worn down by its burdensomeness but energized by its light. *For the precept of the Lord is lucid and enlightens the eyes* (Ps. 18:9), and *the law of the Lord is unsullied, transforming souls* (Ps. 18:8). By grace he forgives sins and pours out the spirit of love, which is why practicing righteousness is no longer burdensome but indeed joyful.”

In Romans 7:15-23, St. Paul speaks of the concupiscence of the flesh. (See commentary on Romans 7:15-23.)

Romans 4:1-8

“What shall we say then that Abraham hath found, who is our father according to the flesh. For if Abraham were justified by works he hath whereof to glory but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was reputed to him unto justice. Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned according to grace, but according to debt.” (Rom. 4:1-4)

St. Paul is speaking of the work of redemption, which only the God-man (the Messias) could do, that remits men’s sins and thus pays their sin debt. Because sin is an offence by man against the infinite God, the only person that can redeem men and thus pay the sin debt to God is a sinless man and who is also the infinite God:

“No brother can redeem, nor shall man redeem: he shall not give to God his ransom, Nor the price of the redemption of his soul: and shall labour forever.. But God will redeem my soul from the hand of hell, when he shall receive me.” (Ps. 48:8-9, 16)

There is no work, then, that Abraham could have done to redeem himself. Therefore, faith in God and the Messias who would redeem men was necessary for sins to be covered during the Old Testament era and thus for men to be partially justified. And faith in the God-man, Jesus Christ, who came and redeemed men was necessary for sins to be remitted during the New Covenant era and thus for men to be completely justified. The next verse of Romans 4 says,

“But to him that worketh not, yet believeth in him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reputed to justice according to the purpose of the grace of God.” (Rom. 4:5)

In context, this means that he who knoweth that he cannot work his own redemption is justified by his faith in God as the only one who can do the work of redemption that can justify and save him.

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