

Romans 4:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Paul explains why law cannot be the means of inheritance: *hou gar nomos orgēn katergazetai* (ὁ γὰρ νόμος ὀργὴν κατεργάζεται, "for the law works wrath"). The verb *katergazetai* (κατεργάζεται) means accomplishes, produces, brings to completion. Law's function is not to enable obedience but to reveal and even provoke disobedience, thereby incurring divine wrath (cf. 3:20, 5:20, 7:7-13). This is not law's fault but humanity's—the law is holy, righteous, and good (7:12), but we are sinful.

The explanatory clause *hou gar ouk estin nomos oude parabasis* (οὐ γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος οὐδὲ παράβασις, "for where there is no law, neither is there transgression") establishes a principle: law defines and quantifies sin. *Parabasis* (παράβασις) means transgression, stepping over a boundary. Without the boundary (law), there can be trespass in fact but not transgression in a legal sense. Paul is not saying people without the law don't sin (1:18-32 refutes that), but that law makes sin "exceedingly sinful" (7:13) by giving it the character of direct rebellion against God's revealed will.

Historical Context

Jewish theology viewed Torah as the path to life and blessing (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). Paul's claim that law works wrath rather than righteousness would shock his Jewish readers—yet he grounds this in Torah itself, which pronounces

curses on disobedience (Deut 27:26, quoted in Gal 3:10). The law reveals God's standard but provides no power to meet it, leaving humanity under condemnation.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How can law be good and holy (7:12) yet work wrath—what does this reveal about the problem of sin?
2. What does Paul mean that 'where no law is, there is no transgression,' and how does law magnify sin?
3. Why is it essential to understand law's function as condemning rather than justifying before we can embrace the gospel?

Interlinear Text

ὁ	γὰρ	νόμος	ὀργὴν	κατεργάζεται·	οὗ	γὰρ	οὐκ
G3588	Because	law	wrath	worketh	where	Because	no
	G1063	G3551	G3709	G2716	G3757	G1063	G3756

ἔστιν	νόμος	οὐδὲ	παράβασις
is	law	there is no	transgression
G2076	G3551	G3761	G3847

Additional Cross-References

Romans 5:13 (Word): (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

Galatians 3:10 (Word): For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

1 Corinthians 15:56 (Word): The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

John 3:36 (Judgment): He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Galatians 3:19 (Word): Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

1 John 3:4 (Word): Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

Ephesians 5:6 (Judgment): Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

Jeremiah 4:8 (Parallel theme): For this gird you with sackcloth, lament and howl: for the fierce anger of the LORD is not turned back from us.

John 15:22 (Sin): If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.

Ezekiel 7:19 (Judgment): They shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD: they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels: because it is the stumblingblock of their iniquity.