

Romans 5:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

(For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

Analysis

For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law—Paul addresses potential objections: if law reveals transgression (4:15), was sin not sin before Sinai? He affirms sin existed from Adam to Moses, but without law's explicit commands, sin wasn't 'charged to account' (λογέομαι, logeomai, the same verb used for imputing righteousness in 4:3-8) in the same way. This doesn't mean pre-law humans were guiltless but that transgression becomes explicit rebellion when divine commands are known.

The parenthesis explains verse 12's claim that 'all sinned': death reigned even over those who had no explicit law to break, proving sin's reality and power apart from Mosaic legislation. Paul distinguishes between sin's existence (always present), its identification as transgression (requires law), and its condemnatory power (operative from Adam onward). This prepares for verse 14's statement that death reigned universally, not merely over law-breakers.

Historical Context

Paul navigates a complex theological issue for his dual audience: Jewish readers might think only law-breakers (Israel post-Sinai) were truly guilty, while Gentiles without Torah might consider themselves innocent. Paul insists all humanity from Adam onward has been under sin's dominion and death's reign. The period 'from Adam to Moses' (pre-law era) demonstrates that humanity's problem isn't merely

ignorance of divine commands but fundamental corruption requiring more than moral instruction.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does the reality of sin existing before explicit law challenge moralities based solely on known rules rather than God's character?
2. What does the distinction between sin's presence and its formal imputation teach about degrees of guilt and judgment (cf. Luke 12:47-48)?
3. If sin's power operates apart from law, why do people often think becoming more religious or law-observant solves their sin problem?

Interlinear Text

ἄχρι	γὰρ	νόμου	ἁμαρτία	ἦν	ἐν	κόσμῳ	ἁμαρτία	δὲ
until	(For	law	sin	was	in	the world	sin	but
G891	G1063	G3551	G266	G2258	G1722	G2889	G266	G1161

οὐκ	ἐλλογεῖται	μὴ	ὄντος	νόμου
not	imputed	no	when there is	law
G3756	G1677	G3361	G5607	G3551

Additional Cross-References

Romans 4:15 (Word): Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

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

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

Genesis 38:7 (Parallel theme): And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him.

Genesis 38:10 (Parallel theme): And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also.

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