

# Romans 4:13-15 Commentary

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**Romans 4:13** For the [promise](#) to [Abraham](#) or to his [descendants](#) that he would be [heir](#) of the [world](#) was not [through](#) the [Law](#), but [through](#) the [righteousness](#) of [faith](#). ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [Ou gar dia nomou e epaggelia to Abraam e to spermati autou. to kleronomon auton einai \(PAN\) kosmou. alla dia dikaiosunes pisteos:](#)

**Amplified:** It is clear, then, that God's promise to give the whole earth to Abraham and his descendants was not based on obedience to God's law, but on the new relationship with God that comes by faith. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** It is clear, then, that God's promise to give the whole earth to Abraham and his descendants was not based on obedience to God's law, but on the new relationship with God that comes by faith. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** The ancient promise made to Abraham and his descendants, that they should eventually possess the world, was given not because of any achievements made through obedience to the Law, but because of the righteousness which had its root in faith. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** For not through law was the promise made to Abraham or to his offspring that he should be the heir of the world, but through a righteousness which pertains to faith. (Eerdmans)

**Young's Literal:** For not through law is the promise to Abraham, or to his seed, of his being heir of the world, but through the righteousness of faith

ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS				
Romans 1:18-3:20	Romans 3:21-5:21	Romans 6:1-8:39	Romans 9:1-11:36	Romans 12:1-16:27
SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	SERVICE OF SALVATION
God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	Gods Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
		Power Given	Promises Fulfilled	Paths Pursued
Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
God's Righteousness IN LAW	God's Righteousness IMPUTED	God's Righteousness OBEYED	God's Righteousness IN ELECTION	God's Righteousness DISPLAYED
Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
Doctrine				Duty
Life by Faith				Service by Faith
Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work " <a href="#">Jensen's Survey of the NT</a> "				

**FOR THE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM OR TO HIS DESCENDANTS THAT HE WOULD BE HEIR OF THE WORLD: ou gar dia nomou e epaggelia to abraam e to spermati autou o kleronomon auton einai (PAN) tou kosmou:**

- Ge 12:3; 17:4,5,16; 22:17,18; 28:14; 49:10; Ps 2:8; 72:11

Listen to Dr J Vernon McGee on Mp3 - [Romans 4:9-25](#)

**For (gar)** - Notice the little preposition "for" (there are over 9000 "for's" in Scripture) and if the context indicates, as it does in this passage, that the "for" is a **term of explanation**, pause and ask yourself what is the Spirit seeking to explain? In fact, stop reading right now and observe and see if you can determine what is being explained. Notice how pausing to ponder will always force you to examine the context. You should practice this simple discipline every time you encounter a **for**, and while not every instance is a term of explanation, a **"for"** at the beginning of a verse is almost always is used with that grammatical sense. I guarantee that if you begin to **"pause and ponder,"** you will radically rejuvenate your "Read Through the Bible in a Year" program! You might even get a small journal and begin to keep notes on what the Spirit illuminates and how this truth can be applied to your daily life. As you practice interrogating the text (for, therefore, but, so that, etc) with 5W/H questions such as "What's the for explaining?", you will begin to learn to (1) Read the Bible inductively (power point overview) and to (2) Meditate (see also Primer on Biblical Meditation) on the Scripture. Meditation or "chewing the cud" of the Scripture (cf Mt 4:4, Job 23:12-note, Jer 15:16) so to speak is a vanishing discipline in our fast paced, hi tech, low touch society, but a spiritual discipline which God promises to greatly bless (See Ps 1:1-note, Ps 1:2-note, Ps 1:3-note, Joshua 1:8-note, cf Ps 4:4, 19:14, 27:4, 49:4, 63:6, Ps 77:6, 77:12, Ps 104:34, Ps 119:15, 119:23, 119:27, Ps 119:48, 119:78, Ps 119:97, 119:99, Ps 119:148, 143:5, Ps 145:5) From the preceding passages which "organ" of our being is most often involved/engaged in meditation? What are the subjects or the focus of meditation? Reading the Bible without meditating on it is like eating without chewing. We must read...

Scripture every day  
And meditate on what God said  
To fight temptation from the world  
And live a life that's Spirit led  
(see note) --Sper

Paul begins with this conjunction (**gar**) which serves as a marker of cause or reason between events, to amplify why it is that those who "are of the circumcision" (Ro 4:12) can only inherit the "promise of Abraham" "through the righteousness of faith" and "not through the Law" or as he describes it in (Ro 4:12) by following "in the steps of the faith of" their "father Abraham". "

In short **for** explains why righteousness came to Abraham only by **faith, faith** being one of the key words of Romans 4.

**Note the Greek order is emphatic** - "for not through the law" begins this passage which again places Paul's (God's) emphasis on the fact the promise comes not through obeying the law but through the righteousness of faith.

For **not through law** is the promise to Abraham, or to his seed, of his being heir of the world, but through the righteousness of faith (Young's Literal)

**W E Vine** adds that

The Revised Version rightly stresses the phrase "not through the law," and, while the immediate reference is to the Law of Sinai, yet the article is not used, and therefore "law" is here represented as a principle. The argument is continued and extended now with reference to the Law of Sinai. As the blessings divinely promised to Abraham have been shown to be independent of circumcision, so now they are shown to be independent of the Law. ([Collected Writings](#))

**The promise to Abraham** - Note that nowhere in the OT does God make this specific promise (**heir of the world**). The promise is a reference to the unilateral, unconditional covenant that God cut with Abraham.

**Promise (1860)** (**epaggelia/epangelia** form **epi** = intensifier or upon + **aggéllō** = tell, declare) means an announcement upon and was primarily legal term denoting summons or a promise to do or give something. It is used only of the promises of God (except Acts 23:21) and refers to a thing promised, a gift graciously given and is not a pledge secured by negotiation.

Many Jews thought that the privileges they enjoyed came from their adherence to (obedience to) the Mosaic Law but clearly this line of reasoning is flawed and patently false. In fact the promise given to Abraham was some 430 years before the law was given at Mt Sinai and hence the law does not annul the Abrahamic covenant. It was merely added alongside (see notes on purpose of the Law) until Christ should come to fulfill it (Gal 3:17, 18, 19).

It is worth noting that Romans 4:13 marks the first of eight uses of the word **promise** in Romans (Ro 4:13, 14, 16, 20; 9:4, 8, 9; 15:8)

**Descendants (4690)** (**sperma** from **speíro** = to sow) literally referred to seed sown, as the seed contains the germ of new fruit. In Classic Greek **sperma** primarily signifies an individual offspring. **Sperma** is actually singular in the Greek and thus the text literally reads "to his seed".

Keep in mind that Abraham's physical descendants include not only the Jewish people, but also the Arab world (thru Ishmael) and the nations listed in (Ge 25:1, 2, 3, 4). All who trust Jesus Christ as Savior are spiritual children of Abraham (Gal 3:6, 7, 8, 9), and that will be a vast multitude (Rev 7:9-[note](#)).

**Vine** remarks that...

In Galatians 3:16 the apostle speaks of Abraham's **seed** as signifying Christ. Here the word **seed** is used in the collective sense of descendants (as in Gal. 3:29). ([Collected Writings](#))

**Heir (2818)** (**Kleronomos [word study]** from **kleros** = lot + **nomos** = something parceled out, allotted) means a sharer by lot, an inheritor, a possessor. In the Greco-Roman world the kleronomos was a legal term.

**Kleronomos** signifies more than one who inherits, or obtains a portion, for it means to take into possession **Kleronomos** while being virtually a title, also conveys the significance of dominion and authority.

**What does Paul mean "heir of the world"?** The context is those who by faith are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, so this might refer to a "world without end", that which is to come when Christ sets up His kingdom on earth and then when a new Jerusalem, new Heaven and new Earth are brought into existence by God after world is burned with fire. So Abraham's spiritual heirs receive a "KINGDOM WHICH CANNOT BE SHAKEN", a better country, a city God is preparing (Heb 11:13, 14, 15, 16-notes, Jn 14:3, etc).

**MacArthur** feels that although God did not give Abraham a specific promise that he would be **heir of the world**...

The promise to Abraham was embodied in God's covenant with Abraham, in which the patriarch was told that his descendants would be heirs **of the world** (Ge 12:3; 15:6; 18:18; 22:18). In analyzing God's promise to Abraham, four significant factors emerge.

First, the **promise** involved a land (see Ge 15:18, 19, 20, 21) in which Abraham would live but that would not be possessed until some five centuries later, when Joshua led the Israelites in their conquest of Canaan.

Second, the **promise** also involved a people, who would be so numerous that they could not be numbered, like the dust of the earth and the stars in the sky (Ge 13:16; 15:5). Eventually, Abraham would become the “father of many nations” (Ge 17:5; cf. Ro 4:17).

Third, the **promise** involved a blessing of the entire world through Abraham’s descendants (Ge 12:3).

Fourth, the **promise** would be fulfilled in the giving of a Redeemer, who would be a descendant of Abraham through whom the whole world would be blessed by the provision of salvation. That promise to Abraham was, in essence, a preaching to him of the gospel (Gal 3:8). ([MacArthur, J: Romans 1-8. Chicago: Moody Press](#))

**MacDonald** -The expression **heir of the world** means that he would be the father of believing Gentiles as well as of Jews (Ro 4:11, 12), that he would be the father of many nations (Ro 4:17, 18) and not just of the Jewish nation. In its fullest sense the promise will be fulfilled when the Lord Jesus, Abraham’s seed, takes the scepter of universal empire and reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords.

**Gregg Herrick** - Though the promise is never spoken as such in the OT, it is clear that this is Paul’s way of summarizing all the aspects of the promise including the land, seed, Abraham’s great name, and universal blessing (cf. Ge 12:1,2, 3; 15). The covenant established with Abraham had far reaching consequences and became the controlling covenant throughout history. The Davidic (2Sa 7:8-16; Ps 89) and the New covenants (Jer 31:31, 32,33; Luke 22:15, 16, 17, 18, 20) are organically related to the Abrahamic as developments of the seed and blessing aspects, respectively. The establishment of the millennial kingdom at Christ’s second advent is the final great fulfillment of this covenant in human history. At that time (and indeed on into the eternal state), one will be able to say that our father Abraham has become the heir of the world. ([Study and Exposition of Romans 4:13-22](#))

**Marvin Vincent** - Paul here takes the Jewish conception of the universal dominion of the Messianic theocracy prefigured by the inheritance of Canaan, divests it of its Judaistic element, and raises it to a Christological truth. (**Ed:** Vincent’s comment is a bit difficult to follow but I think is reasonably accurate assessment of what it means to be **heir of the world**). ([Romans 4: Greek Word Studies](#))

**Phil Newton** remarks that **heir of the world**...

... is strange language! Yet it took this kind of language for the Apostle to capsule the immeasurable worth of God’s promise in the gospel. Jesus Christ has secured forgiveness of sins through His atoning death and He has secured an eternal inheritance for all that believe. He is showing us, as John Piper puts it, “future grace” in this statement. The gospel goes beyond this life! Through the gospel we are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Ro 8:17-note). In other words, all that God owns, and that’s everything in the universe visible and invisible, we will share in with Christ for eternity.

It’s precisely what Jesus had in mind in the beatitude: “Blessed are the gentle (“meek”), for they shall inherit the earth” (Mt 5:5-note). Though Christians are considered the outcasts of the world in this life, the day will come when those humbled by the gospel through faith in Christ will inherit the new heaven and the new earth! Paul uses similar language to the Corinthians to help them understand the weightiness of belonging to Christ. “For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God” (1Co 3:21, 22, 23). So, is the promise worthwhile? It involves all that is in Christ and all that Christ reigns over as Sovereign Lord.

**How does the promise become reality?** That’s the whole reason that Paul capsules the far reaching effects of the gospel as an eternal inheritance so that we might understand that something of such infinite value is not a reward for a few paltry good deeds. It is “not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.” ([Sermons from the Epistle to the Romans - Recommended](#))

**John Piper** explains that “eternity (**Ed:** In context Piper is speaking about being either an **heir** of the world or an **heir** of wrath) compares to this life the way the Rocky Mountains compare to the ripples of an orange peel. ([Inheriting the World Depends on Faith, Not Law](#))

**World** (2889) (**kosmos** from **komeo** = tend, take care of) can refer to an orderly arrangement. **Kosmos** speaks of an ordered system and gives us English cosmetic which has the basic meaning of covering up disorder with something that brings order.

The Greeks had a word, **chaos** which comes into our language in its exact spelling, “chaos” and was used by pagan Greek philosophers of what they considered to be the first state of the universe. The word meant “unformed matter.” It spoke of darkness, a

vast gulf or chasm, a pit, the nether abyss. But the Bible writers speak of the original state of the universe as one of a harmonious arrangement of things, a **kosmos** not a **chaos**. God, speaking of the laying of the cornerstone of the universe, speaks of the sons of God, the angels, shouting for joy at its creation (Job 38:6, 7). The holy angels did not shout for joy over a chaos.

**WAS NOT THROUGH (obedience to) THE LAW BUT THROUGH THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH: ou gar dia nomou (Not thru law = first for emphasis) alla dia dikaiosunes pisteos:**

- Gal 3:16, 17, 18,29

**Not through the law** - As noted above this phrase is first in this verse for emphasis that the promise was **not** (ou = absolute negation) based on obedience to the law. Why not? For one reason no one could keep the law perfectly, with one exception, and that One became our Sin Bearer!

Paul explains that it could **not** have been **through the law** for the "Law" (assuming law refers to the Old Covenant given at Mt Sinai) had not even been given at the time God cut His unconditional covenant with Abraham...

Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God (Ge 12:1, 2, 3, 15:18), so as to nullify (make void) the promise (to Abraham that in him "all the families of the earth shall be blessed."). For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise. (Gal 3:16-18)

And if you belong to Christ, then you are **Abraham's offspring, heirs** according to promise. (Gal 3:29)

**Comment:** By belonging to Christ, believers are also Abraham's posterity, for Christ is the seed of Abraham. Since believers have entered into relationship with Christ, they must consequently have a share in the same state, and must likewise be Abraham's seed. ([Wuest](#))

**Marvin Vincent** adds: Paul shows that Abraham was justified by faith, and was thus constituted the spiritual father of all believers in Christ, whether circumcised or uncircumcised. The purpose of God in making the inheritance of the promise dependent on faith was that the promise might be sure to all the seed. Abraham, he says, is "the father of us all" (Rom. 4:16). This spiritual paternity does away with the current Jewish notion of physical paternity. Physical relationship with Abraham is of no significance in the economy of salvation. The apostle "discovers the basis of Christian universalism in the very life of him in whose person theocratic particularism was founded. He has demonstrated the existence of a time when he represented Gentilism, or, to speak more properly, mankind in general; and it was during this period, when he was not yet a Jew, but simply a man, that he received salvation" (Godet). ([Galatians 3](#))

The fulfillment of the promise was not as a result of Abraham's keeping the law. Just as Abraham was not justified by the rite of circumcision (Ro 4:9, 10, 11, 12), neither was he justified by keeping the Mosaic law (Ro 4:13, 14, 15) which did not even exist when the promise was made to Abraham.

**Vine** feels that "**righteousness of faith**... is set in contrast to obedience to law." (Ibid)

**Ironside** adds that "The **promise** that he should be **heir of the world** was not given to him through the law - that is, it was not a reward of merit, something he had earned by obedience (Ro 4:13). It was on the ground of sovereign grace. Hence his righteousness, like ours if we believe, was a "**by faith righteousness**." The heirs of the promise are those who accept it in the same faith, otherwise it would be utterly invalidated. It was an unconditional promise.

**Kenneth Wuest** - By the phrase **righteousness of faith** we are not to understand that the **faith** exercised by the sinner is righteous in quality. The **promise** was made to Abraham not upon the basis of any attempted obedience to the law on his part but because of that **faith** which he exercised, which **faith** was of such a nature as to cause God to put **righteousness** down to his account. ([Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans](#))

**Righteousness** (1343) (**dikaioσune** from **dikaioσ** = being proper or right in the sense of being fully justified being or in accordance with what God requires) is the quality of being upright. In its simplest sense **dikaioσune** conveys the idea of conformity to a standard or norm. In this sense **righteousness** is the opposite of hamartia (sin), which is defined as missing of the mark set by God. In this sense **righteousness** is the opposite of hamartia (sin), which is defined as missing of the mark set by God.

**Dikaosune** is rightness of character before God and rightness of actions before men. Righteousness of God could be succinctly stated as all that God is, all that He commands, all that He demands, all that He approves, all that He provides through faith in Christ (Click here to read Pastor Ray Pritchard's interesting analysis of **righteousness** in the Gospel of Matthew).

**Of faith** (4102) (**pistis** [word study]) is synonymous with trust or belief and is the conviction of the truth of anything, but in Scripture speaks of belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it. As **faith** relates to Christ it represents a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through Whom we obtain eternal salvation and entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Stated another way, eternal salvation and the promise made to Abraham is available to both Jews and Gentiles but **only** through belief in Jesus Christ and no other way (Acts 4:12, Jn 14:6).

**Wayne Grudem - Saving faith** is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God. This definition emphasizes that **saving faith** is not just a belief in facts but personal trust in Jesus to save me... The definition emphasizes personal trust in Christ, not just belief in facts about Christ. Because saving faith in Scripture involves this personal trust, the word "trust" is a better word to use in contemporary culture than the word "faith" or "belief." The reason is that we can "believe" something to be true with no personal commitment or dependence involved in it. ([Grudem, W. A. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine Zondervan](#)) (Bolding added)

**Phil Newton** - And what is this faith? It is reliance on Christ alone for righteousness. It is trust in the death of Christ as sufficient to satisfy eternal justice on our behalf. It is dependence on Christ's faithfulness to every detail necessary to declare a sinner as righteous before the eternally holy God. The promise of God is not a payment for our morality but the reward of Jesus Christ's finished work, for all that believe in Him. ([Sermons from the Epistle to the Romans - Recommended](#))

**Maclaren - Faith** is the hand that grasps. It is the means of communication, it is the channel through which the grace which is the life, or, rather, I should say, the life which is the grace, comes to us. It is the open door by which the angel of God comes in with his gifts. It is like the petals of the flowers, opening when the sunshine kisses them, and, by opening, laying bare the depths of their calyxes to be illuminated and coloured, and made to grow by the sunshine which itself has opened them, and without the presence of which, within the cup, there would have been neither life nor beauty. So faith is the basis of everything; the first shoot from which all the others ascend. (Read full sermon on **1Thessalonians 1:3**)

**Romans 4:14** For **if those** who are of the **Law** are **heirs**, **faith** is **made void** and the **promise** is **nullified**; (**NASB: Lockman**)

**Greek:** [ei gar oi ek nomou kleronomoi, kekenotai \(3SRPI\) e pistis kai katergetai \(3SRPI\) e epaggelia:](#)

**Amplified:** So if you claim that God's promise is for those who obey God's law and think they are "good enough" in God's sight, then you are saying that faith is useless. And in that case, the promise is also meaningless. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** So if you claim that God's promise is for those who obey God's law and think they are "good enough" in God's sight, then you are saying that faith is useless. And in that case, the promise is also meaningless. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** For if, after all, they who pin their faith to keeping the Law were to inherit God's world, it would make nonsense of faith in God himself, and destroy the whole point of the promise. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** For, assuming that those who are of the law are heirs, the aforementioned faith has been voided with the result that it is permanently invalidated, and the aforementioned promise has been rendered inoperative with the result that it is in a state of permanent inoperation (Eerdmans)

**Young's Literal:** For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;

**FOR IF THOSE WHO ARE OF THE LAW ARE HEIRS: ei gar oi ek nomou kleronomoi:**

- Ro 4:16; Gal 2:21; 3:18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24; 5:4; Phil 3:9; Heb 7:19,28

**For (gar)** - Notice the little preposition "for" (there are over 9000 "for's" in Scripture) and if the context indicates, as it does in this passage, that the "for" is a term of explanation, pause and ask yourself what is the Spirit seeking to explain?



**Law** ([3551](#)) (**nomos** from **némo** = divide among, parcel out, allot) is etymologically something parceled out, allotted, what one has in use and possession; hence, usage, custom. In the present context "nomos" refers to the Mosaic system of legislation. The **law** became so exalted by the rabbis in Judaism that it became the explanation and justification of Israel's existence. However, at the heart of OT religion was the covenant and not the **law**, which was only a standard of obedience necessary for the preservation of the covenant relationship. In postexilic Israel, **obedience to the law** was the necessary condition to become a member of God's people and thus the **law** became more central than covenant in the religion of Judaism.

Paul is saying that if law keepers receive the promise, faith is irrelevant and of no value.

**A. T. Robertson** - If legalists are heirs of the Messianic promise to Abraham (condition of first class, assumed as true for argument's sake), the faith is emptied of all meaning... and the promise to Abraham is made permanently idle.

Judaizers wanted their hearers to go back to Moses, but that was not far enough. We must go back to Abraham where the promise started. The Law did not annul the promise. The Law was given to reveal sin (Ro 3:20-note) and prepare the way for Christ to come and fulfill the promise (Gal 3:24,25). The law is a tutor, not a savior; a mirror, not a cleanser. (**For summary see Purpose of the Law**)

**FAITH IS MADE VOID AND THE PROMISE IS NULLIFIED: kekenotai (3SRPI)e pistis kai katergetai (3SRPI) e epaggelia:**

- Ro 3:31; Nu 30:12,15; Ps 119:126; Isa 55:11; Jer 19:7

## **FAITH IS BELIEVING LAW IS DOING**

**Faith is made void** - It would be unnecessary if keeping the law made one an heir of the promise.

**Made Void** ([2758](#)) (**kenoo** from **kenos** = empty, void) means deprived of its effect or divested of its power or force. The idea is to take away the power of something and so to make it of no meaning or effect. It meant to render vain or useless.

The **perfect tense** speaks of past completed action and with continued results. **Wuest** puts it this way = "has been voided and as a present result is in a state of invalidation."

Faith is made futile and empty of all meaning because if accessing of the promise was through keeping the Law then it would not be based on trust but on what I could do.

**Phil Newton** - Paul's "if" asks us to suppose for a moment that adherence to the law could count for righteousness before God. The Greek does not have the definite article, the Law, which indicates that the Apostle is likely using law in a broad sense. It may be that when we think of law we mean the Ten Commandments. Or we may have in mind the additional civil and ceremonial laws in the Mosaic Law. Or we may think of law as the codes of morality in a given society whether written or unwritten. The emphasis on law in this context is upon the action that one takes due to a belief system or moral code or system of ethics. One acts on this code because he thinks that he can earn points with God or even achieve righteousness with God. But what if one could do that? If you can achieve righteousness through morality then "faith is made void." The word means that faith becomes meaningless or empty. The perfect passive verb indicates that this always and permanently voids faith. ([Sermons from the Epistle to the Romans](#))

**William MacDonald** explains "**faith is made void**" writing "Faith is set aside because it is a principle that is completely opposite to law: faith is a matter of **believing**, while law is a matter of **doing**. The promise would then be worthless because it would be based on conditions that no one would be able to meet." ([Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

**The promise is nullified** - It becomes meaningless.

**John MacArthur** explains that "Making a promise contingent on an impossible condition nullifies the promise" ([The MacArthur Study Bible](#))

**Newton** - When we rely upon our system of morality or code of ethics or the Golden Rule for righteousness "the promise is nullified." What promise does Paul mean? He's referring to the gospel promise made to Abraham of the righteousness by faith through Christ on behalf of sinners. This promise made in the gospel is nullified or rendered to no effect. In other words, the gospel means nothing apart from faith alone in Christ. If we are clinging to anything that we've done that might accord with the Ten Commandments or the Golden Rule or any system of morality as the means to righteousness, then we have rendered the gospel promises void. ([Sermons from the Epistle to the Romans](#))

**Nullified** ([2673](#)) (**katargeo** from **kata** = intensifies meaning + **argeo** = to be idle or inactive from **argos** = ineffective, idle, inactive from **a** = without + **érgon** = work) literally means to reduce to inactivity. The idea is to make the power or force of something ineffective and so to render powerless, reduce to inactivity. To do away with. To put out of use. To cause to be idle or useless. To render entirely idle, inoperative or ineffective. Cause something to come to an end or cause it to cease to happen. To abolish or cause not to function. To free or release from an earlier obligation or relationship. To no longer take place.

**Katargeo** is in the **perfect tense** which speaks of a permanent effect. Wuest expands the sense of the perfect tense this way "the aforementioned promise has been rendered inoperative with the result that it is in a state of permanent inoperation." That is if those who were under the Law were those who would become the legitimate heirs of the promises made to Abraham, then this would permanently nullify faith or make faith forever of no effect. Praise God, that is not the case as Paul explains!

See [Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words for discussion of katargeo](#)

**Vine** explains that **katargeo** "never means "to annihilate." (= to destroy utterly and completely and thus cause to cease to exist) The general idea in the word is that of depriving a thing of the use for which it is intended. Thus it implies, not loss of being, but loss of well-being (**Ed note**: although this latter idea cannot be easily applied to many the NT occurrences which refer to inanimate things such as the Law, death, the power of sin, etc). ([Collected writings of W. E. Vine](#))

**Katargeo** is clearly a "Pauline verb" as shown by the 27 uses (15 in the **passive voice**) in the NASB (Luke 13:7; Ro 3:3, 31; 4:14; 6:6; 7:2, 6; 1 Cor 1:28; 2:6; 6:13; 13:8, 10-11; 15:24, 26; 2Cor 3:7, 11, 13f; Gal 3:17; 5:4, 11; Eph 2:15; 2Th 2:8; 2Ti 1:10; Heb 2:14)

**NAS** renderings = abolished, 4; abolishing, 1; bring to an end, 1; did away, 1; do away, 1; done away, 4; fades away, 1; fading, 1; fading away, 1; nullified, 1; nullify, 4; passing away, 1; released, 2; removed, 1; render powerless, 1; severed, 1; use, 1.

Consider lingering over and pondering all the NT uses of **katargeo** (click the links above or study through many of the NT uses noted below) to mine the encouraging, edifying truths associated with this great "Pauline verb." You will not be disappointed.

The basic idea of **katargeo** is to cause something to be idle or useless, inoperative or ineffective.

**Katargeo** always denotes a nonphysical destruction by means of a superior force coming in to replace the force previously in effect, as e.g. light destroys darkness. (Frieberg)

**Katargeo** as discussed below can mean to **cause the release of someone from an obligation** -- think about this. All men are born in Adam and owe a wage (debt) called death (Ro 3:23-note). But if anyone by grace through faith (Eph 2:8, 2:9-note) enters the "ark" which is "in Christ" they are delivered from "the wrath to come" (1Th 1:10-note) and from eternal death because Christ has paid the price in full that **releases** us from our **obligation** to pay the debt incurred by our sin.

Someone has written that **katargeo** is pictured by our well known English phrases like "to pull the teeth out of," or "to declaw."

**Below are many of the NT uses of Katargeo to help one understand the meaning of this verb in a variety of different contexts.**

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**Romans 3:3** (note) "What then? If some did not believe, their (the Jew's) unbelief will not **nullify** (katargeo) the faithfulness of God, will it?"

**Comment:** The fact that many people reject the Scriptures is of no effect = katargeo, for as the Psalmist testifies "Forever, O LORD, Thy word is settled in heaven." -- Psalm 119:89. God remains faithful to His covenant promises to Israel originally given to Abraham -- beginning in Genesis 12:1-3 -- and passed on to the lines of Isaac and Jacob. The OT amply testifies to God's faithfulness in the face of Israel's unfaithfulness. For example, of the generation that received the law at Mt Sinai, only two adults proved faithful, Caleb and Joshua. Nevertheless, God brought the whole nation of Israel into the land of Canaan as He had promised, though the unbelieving generation died in the wilderness.) In short, to insist that the lack of faith of those who were entrusted with God's Word hardly makes that Word of **no effect** (= katargeo).

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**Romans 3:31** (note) "Do we then **nullify** (katargeo) the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law."

**Comment:** In other words Paul is saying that if one emphasizes the vital role of faith in salvation, by do doing he is not making the Law of no use = katargeo. Click here to read a summary of the 4 effects of the Law.) Paul's point is that justification by faith does not invalidate the purpose of the Law but in fact establishes it because Law was not meant to save to reveal sin.

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**Romans 6:6** (note) knowing this, that our old self (see discussion of "old man") was crucified with Him, that our body of sin **might be done away with** (katargeo = make ineffective by removing its power of control) that we should no longer be slaves to sin.

**Comment:** Yes, Sin as a power, is made inoperative, but it is not annihilated as all believers have experienced. When we as believers make "wrong choices" (or let's call it what it is, when we sin, doing our own thing, going our own way) we can still "recharge" or "revive" the old master ("the Sin") that persists latent within every believer.

Before Christ gave us a new heart, "the Sin" within us ruled us, wielding a power over us which we could not resist; and which led us to commit sins. The law functioned to arouse the sinful desire, but no longer has that effect (unless we choose to put ourselves back up under a list of do's and don'ts). But now that our old self has been nailed to the cross of Christ, the power of sin and the effect of the Law over our physical bodies have been **rendered inoperative** (katargeo). (Ro 6:6-for more discussion notes)

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**Romans 7:2** For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is **released** (**perfect tense** = a permanent effect) from the law concerning the husband. (see **note** Romans 7:2)

**Romans 7:6** But now we have been **released** (aorist tense = definite event in the past at the time of our salvation, a "done deal") from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit (In Christ we can serve the Lord, even keeping the Law, because of the indwelling Spirit's enablement and empowerment) and not in oldness of the letter (= "oldness of the Law", the keeping of the Law externally, "legalistically", through mere outward conformity without an internal change, a "new heart" provided by the Gospel which brings the New Covenant). (see **note** Romans 7:6)

**Comment:** So we see that the "law" that Paul refers to, that they would be familiar with and which says a woman is bound to her husband, is no longer in effect if the husband dies. The hold it once had on the wife is now **nullified**. Look at verse 3: "So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man." To reiterate, these verses teach that as death releases a widow from the law of marriage, so Christ's death releases believers who are united with him from the Law.

**Constable** adds that "It is as though God shifted the transmissions of our lives into neutral gear. Now something else drives our lives, namely the Holy Spirit. Sin and the Law no longer drive us forward, though we can engage those powers if we choose to do so and take back control of our lives from God." ([Tom Constable's Expository Notes](#))

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**1Cor 2:6** Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are **passing away** (**katargeo** = all the humanistic philosophy of the world's intellectuals and all those who wield power will eventually come to nothing - all of their policies, decrees, statutes, etc can never accomplish the redemption of the human race and genuine peace for which they all so desperately seek. Such peace is found only in Christ and His Cross!)

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**1Cor 6:13-14** Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food (probably a popular saying pagans used to justify their immorality - food is pleasurable and necessary, and when the stomach says eat we eat. And so they spuriously reason, sex is pleasurable so when the body signals a need for sex, it is only natural to gratify it!) ; but God **will do away with** (**katargeo** = natural appetite belongs to our physical nature created by God but appetite belongs to our present transient state, and appetite will cease to carry out its function --**katargeo**-- when we die) both of them (stomach/appetite and food). Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body (Although the belly is necessary for food, the analogy does not hold with the body - for one thing the body is more than just a physical unit or physical frame, but houses man's entire being, being composed of literal flesh but also associated with spirit.) **14** Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power (which is a further difference between the body and the belly for the body is destined for resurrection but the belly will be rendered inoperative = **katargeo**. These truths should radically impact the believer's thinking in our pagan society which just like Corinth screams at everyone, including believers, "Just Do It"! Paul's logic argues for the opposite conclusion in the mind of believers "Just Don't Do It!").

**Comment:** Thomas Constable has an excellent note on this verse writing that "One might conclude, and some in Corinth were evidently doing so, that since sex was also physical and temporal it was also irrelevant spiritually. However this is a false deduction. The body is part of what the Lord saved and sanctified. Therefore it is for Him, and we should use it for His glory, not for fornication. Furthermore the Lord has a noble purpose and destiny for our bodies. He is for them in that sense. The Lord will resurrect the bodies of most Christians in

the future, all but those that He catches away at the Rapture (1Th 4:17-note). The resurrection of our bodies shows that God has plans for them." - Read Constable's entire note on this verse which logically and schematically lays out Paul's powerful arguments - [Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible Pdf Format](#)

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**1Cor 13:8** Love never fails (i.e., it is eternal); but (Paul proceeds to contrast gifts which are temporal) if there are gifts of prophecy, **they will be done away (katargeo = become useless)**; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, **it will be done away (katargeo = become useless)**.

**Comment:** Prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will come to an end because of the partial, temporary nature of their purpose. The Bible Knowledge Commentary adds that "Every gift is linked in some way to building up the church to maturity—some (prophecy, knowledge, tongues) functioning in the early years of the Church Age and others continuing on till the church is perfected. When that perfection is achieved, the gifts will have served their purposes and will be rendered obsolete. But this will not happen to love. ([Walvoord, J. F., et al: The Bible Knowledge Commentary. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books](#))

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**1Cor 13:10** but when the perfect comes (referring to the eternal, glorified state of believers - although there is some debate on what "perfect" signifies - for one of the best discussions see [MacArthur's commentary on 1 Corinthians](#) or the online source [here](#)), the partial **will be done away**. (katargeo) 11 When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child (Paul's argument is that while we are still on earth, believers by comparison to their future state are like children are to adulthood); when I became a man, **I did away with** (katargeo) childish things.

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**1Cor 15:24-28** then comes the end (this time reference is to the end of the 1000 year reign of Christ, the **Millennium**), when He (Christ) delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He (Christ) has **abolished** (katargeo) all rule and all authority and power.

**Comment:** **katargeo** conveys the idea of making the ruling powers ineffective, by terminating them and setting them aside - specifically this refers to Satan who is unleashed for a short time at the end of the 1000 years, the Millennium, and all those who follow him - although all who enter the Millennial Kingdom are born again, not all Gentiles who are born during this 1000 years will be born again as clearly shown by Rev 20:7, 8, 9-[note](#))

**1Cor 15:25** For He (Christ) must reign (1000 years) until He (Christ) has put all His enemies under His (Christ) feet (fulfilling the promise of Genesis 3:15 for "all His enemies" includes Satan and those he seduces at the end of the 1000 years). **26** The last enemy that will be **abolished (katargeo)** is death (The power that death has to quiet human beings will be forever nullified). **27** For HE (God the Father) HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS (Christ's) FEET. But when He (God the Father) says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He (God the Father) is excepted Who (God the Father) put all things in subjection to Him (Christ). **28** And when all things are subjected to Him (Christ), then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One (God the Father) Who subjected all things to Him (Christ), that God may be all in all. (This will occur after the Great White Throne judgment Rev 20:11-14-[note](#) and coincide with the coming of the New Heaven and New earth, Rev 21:1ff-[notes](#)).

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**2Cor 3:7-8** But if the ministry of death (Why death? Because the Law showed man his sinfulness and gave him no power to break out of it, thus "ministering" death), in letters engraved on stones (the 10 Commandments and by extension the "Mosaic Law", the Old Covenant), came with glory (the Law was good as it had a glory), so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face (see Ex 34:29, 30), **fading (katargeo = Literally "being made useless")** as it was (just as the glory on Moses' face faded (the OT does not mention this fading), so too the Mosaic Law was temporary), **8** how shall the ministry of the Spirit (the Gospel which brings the promises of the New Covenant especially righteousness) fail to be even more with glory (the temporary Old Covenant, like a candle in the presence of the sun, paled and passed away -- the idea of the verb **katargeo** -- before the grandeur of the superior, eternal New Covenant.)?

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**Gal 3:17** What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant (God's unilateral, unconditional, eternal, irrevocable, immutable promise to Abraham first given in Genesis 12:1, 2, 3) previously ratified by God, so as to **nullify** the promise (**katargeo =** The coming of the Mosaic Law did not render the promise to Abraham ineffective or useless) (see Covenant: Abrahamic versus Mosaic).

**Comment:** the complete fulfillment of the promise to Abraham awaits the salvation of those in Israel who believe at the end of the Great Tribulation and beginning of the Millennium, during which all the promises,

including the geographic promises about the boundaries of Israel will be perfectly fulfilled, for as Joshua stated to Israel in Joshua 23:14 "not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed"!

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**Gal 5:4** You **have been severed** (katargeo) from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

**Comment:** The KJV is more literal "Christ is **become of no effect** unto you". Paul is not teaching that one can lose their salvation. He is simply stating that if one relies on the impossible ground of justification by Law (which no one can keep perfectly), that person in effect, makes Christ's finished work of grace on the Cross of no effect. Having refused this small gate and narrow road [Mt 7:13, 14-notes], this person has fallen away from the highway named "by grace through faith" in Christ, Who is the only way, the only truth and the only life, that leads to justification.

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**Galatians 5:11** But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted (Paul is saying that if were to preach circumcision, he would not be persecuted because he would be preaching works based righteousness which would in effect set aside the whole purpose of the Cross of Christ, making it useless = katargeo)? Then the stumbling block of the cross (The Cross offends because it says a man can do nothing to earn salvation but can be saved only by faith - this offends the pride of the Jews and their legalistic, works based righteousness and all "natural" -- unregenerate -- Gentiles) has been **abolished**. (**katargeo** - Paul is saying that Judaism in effect nullified the efficacious work of the Cross for those who continue to practice).

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**Ephesians 2:15** (note) by **abolishing** (**katargeo**) in His flesh the enmity (that smoldered between Jew and Gentile and also between God and man), which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances (all the ceremonial laws, feasts, and sacrifices which uniquely separated Jews from Gentiles), that in Himself He might make the two (Jew and Gentile) into one new (kainos = new qualitatively, something completely new, unlike what it was before) man (Christian), thus establishing peace (root of peace is to bind or join together what is divided, thus setting at one).

**Comment:** Paul's point is that the Law made distinctions between Jews and the rest of pagan society which erected impossible barriers which are now made of no effect = katargeo.

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**2Thessalonians 2:8** And then that lawless one (the Antichrist) will be revealed (he will arrive on the scene of world history at the beginning of the 7 year period prophesied in Daniel 9:27 --see chart on Daniel's Seventieth Week --, orchestrating a covenant of "peace" with Israel, which is broken after 3.5 years, at which time he will be revealed to the entire world for who he really is as he takes his seat in the Temple and proclaims he is God, which sets in motion the last 3.5 year period Jesus called the "Great Tribulation" in Mt 24:15, 21. See also Da 9:24, 25, 26, 27-notes) whom the Lord (Jesus Christ, the King of kings, read Rev 19:11-21-[notes](#), Daniel 7:11) will slay with the breath of His mouth and **bring to an end** (katargeo) by the appearance (epiphaneia = shining forth - English "epiphany") of His coming."

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**2Timothy 1:10** (Paul records the effect of Jesus death, burial and resurrection in second Timothy writing... ) "but now has been revealed by the appearing (epiphaneia = shining forth - English "epiphany") of our Savior Christ Jesus, who **abolished** (**katargeo**) death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (see **note 2 Timothy 1:10**)

**Comment:** **abolished** does not mean annihilation but to make of no effect and reduce to powerlessness because of Christ's death and resurrection. And so because of Christ's sacrifice, physical death **loses its power** or **effectiveness** over believers because for a believer death is the doorway marking our entrance into the presence of our Lord & our Savior Jesus Christ.

**Vine** adds that "**katargeo** or **abolished**" literally means to reduce to inactivity. By His death and resurrection He actually and potentially for all His people robbed death of its sting and rendered its activity nugatory. "By dying, death He slew." As regards death, whether of the body or spiritual death, the Lord Himself said, "He that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die" (Jn 11:26). For the believer physical death is but the entrance upon a condition in which the spirit enjoys an activity far superior to that experienced here, a life entirely free from all effects of sin. This will be extended to his whole being, when the Lord comes to the air to receive the saints to Himself, death in all its forms having been robbed of its power by Him when He accomplished that for which He became incarnate." - [Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#) )

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One of most encouraging uses of **'rendering powerless'** is the final NT occurrence found in the book of Hebrews which describes the effect of Christ's finished work on the devil's nefarious works...

**Hebrews 2:14** "Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same (He Who was and is always fully God became fully Man), that through (the instrument of) death (His finished work on the Cross, His burial and His triumphant resurrection = the message of the Gospel) He **might render powerless** (katargeo) him who had the power of death, that is, the devil (The devil has "the power of death" in the sense that through his lie, he tempted Adam to bring sin into the world, and therefore, death into the world -- Ro 5:12-note Though he would seek to impose physical death on the whole human race if he could, he can only bring about a particular death when God allows it for some greater purpose)." (He 2:14-note)

**Comment:** Christ's death and resurrection robbed death of its sting and rendered its activity of no effect (= katargeo). "By dying, death He slew." Now, for the believer physical death is but a doorway into the presence of our Lord. (Php 1:21-note), cf 2Cor 5:8 "absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord")

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In summary, back to our comments on Romans 4:14, we see that Paul is teaching that the promise of God is **annulled** or **made useless/inoperative** (katargeo) because one would be making a promise contingent upon an impossible condition (i.e., no one can keep the law perfectly) which would nullify the promise.

**Ray Stedman** illustrates this principle... "Now let me help you to understand that: If there is anyone here who is quite athletic, I would like you to do something to demonstrate this for us. I want you to stand here before the pulpit and jump up and touch the ceiling. If you do that, I promise I will give you a thousand dollars. I might have to borrow it, but I will give it to you. Are there any volunteers? I'll even let you stand on the platform. No volunteers? Why? Because, you say to me, "Look, your promise is worthless! You are asking something that no one can do. No one can jump up and touch the ceiling by their natural strength. Your promise is worthless." Even though I sincerely mean it, it has no value to you because you cannot do it." (Read full sermon [The Faith of our Father](#))

**Romans 4:15 for the [Law brings about wrath](#), but [where](#) there is [no law](#), there also is [no violation](#). (NASB: Lockman)**

**Greek:** [o gar nomos orgen katargazetai](#): (3SPMI) [ou de ouk estin](#) (3SPA) [nomos, oude parabasis](#)

**Amplified:** For the Law results in [divine] wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression [of it either]. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** But the law brings punishment on those who try to obey it. (The only way to avoid breaking the law is to have no law to break!) ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** For we have already noted that the Law can produce no promise, only the threat of wrath to come. And, indeed if there were no Law the question of sin would not arise ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** For the law results in divine wrath. Now, where there is not law, neither is there transgression. (Eermans)

**Young's Literal:** for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

**FOR THE LAW BRINGS ABOUT WRATH : [o gar nomos orgen katargazetai](#) (3SPMI):**

- Ro 1:17; 2:5,6; 3:19,20; 5:13,20,21; 7:7, 8, 9, 10,11; Nu 32:14; Dt 29:20-28; 2Ki 22:13; Jer 4:8; Lam 2:22; Ezek 7:19; Zeph 1:18; Jn 3:36; 15:22; Acts 17:30,31; 1Cor 15:56; 2Cor 3:7, 8, 9; Gal 3:10,19; Eph 5:6; Col 3:6; 1Jn 3:4; Rev 6:16,17; 19:15

**For (gar)** - Again we encounter "for" as a **term of explanation**, which should prompt us to pause, ponder and ask what is the Spirit explaining through Paul?

**The Law brings about wrath - How so?** The law exposes man's sinfulness (Ro 7:7, 8, 9, 10, 11; Ga 3:19, 24). The Law serves to stimulate sin (Ro 7:9). The Law brings about wrath because of man's disobedience to the specific law. It condemns those who fail to keep its commandments perfectly and continuously. And since none can do that, all who are under the law are condemned to death.

**Brings about (2716)** ([katargazomai](#) from [katá](#) = intensifier + [ergázomai](#) = work) or works out fully, accomplishes, or finishes. The idea is the law continually (present tense) works to bring about the fulfillment of wrath. The law performs this task successfully and thoroughly, achieving the end (wrath). , carry to conclusion, or carry out a task until it finished.

**Wrath** ([3709](#)) (**orge**) (Click summary of this attribute of God) (See 10 of 36 NT uses of **orge** in Romans - Ro 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4, 5) is a Greek word which originates from the idea of a swelling which progressively increases and eventually bursts. Orge applies to an anger that proceeds from one's settled nature and is thus a deep seated anger, not a petulant, irrational burst such as humans often exhibit. When attributed to God, **orge** is a holy, just revulsion against what sin. **Orge** is anger which has become inveterate (firmly established by long persistence) and so is long-lasting, slow-burning and refuses to be pacified

**Orge** is defined in the very first chapter of Romans as the removal of God's divine protection and so you can do what you want. Wrath from a practical standpoint is the removal of restraints from human beings. Three times in the first chapter of Romans Paul wrote "**God gave them up... God gave them up... God gave them over...**" (Ro 1:24-note, Ro 1:26-note, Ro 1:28-note)

This is one aspect of His holy righteous wrath. God in essence is saying, "You can have your own way but I will bring about just punishment for My wrath."

**C. S. Lewis** said that the whole world consists of just two kinds of people: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God is saying, "Thy will be done."

When God removes the restraints, we begin to fall apart. Therefore **wrath** always results in the disintegration of the human personality as clearly but tragically illustrated in Romans 1. Emptiness, meaninglessness, loneliness, and worthlessness possess us because these individuals created in God's image feel abandoned and lost. They do not know where to turn, and despair and depression press down upon them. There is more to God's wrath as shown in Revelation 6-19 but this aspect of His is one that is currently being meted out. And so Paul's point is that the Law always works itself out in the production of wrath.

**BUT WHERE THERE IS NO LAW NEITHER IS THERE VIOLATION: ou gar ouk estin (3SPAI) nomos oude parabasis:**

- Ro 2:12,13; 5:13

## **NO LAW... NO VIOLATION**

**Piper** explains that what Paul is saying is that "before the Law came in (430 years after the promise to Abraham, Gal 3:17), all kinds of sinful attitudes and actions might go "unnoticed" because there was no specific commandment that was violated. But when the Law comes in, the knowledge of sin explodes (Ro 3:20-note). What was lying dead, as it were, is brought to light as a specific violation or transgression of an explicit command. So, for example, before the Law was given, teenagers may have bad-mouthed their mothers and fathers when they got together. There may have been some vague uneasiness about this. But then came the Law in Ex 20:12, "Honor your father and your mother." Now every disrespectful word is a specific violation of an explicit commandment. And not only is sin exposed more clearly; it increases... through the Law, that is the commandments, the dormant sin in our lives is not only exposed but stirred up and made exceedingly sinful. Commandments make us kick all the harder, and show how bad we really are." (See full sermon [Inheriting the World Depends on Faith, Not Law](#))

**MacDonald:** Transgression ([parabasis](#)) means the violation of a **known law**. Paul does not say that where there is no law, there is no sin. An act can be inherently wrong even if there is no law against it. But it becomes transgression when a sign goes up saying "Speed Limit 20 MPH." The Jews thought they inherited blessing through having the law, but all they inherited was transgression. God gave the law so that sin might be seen as transgression, or to put it another way, so that sin might be seen in all its sinfulness. He never intended it to be the way of salvation for sinful transgressors! " ([Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments](#))

**Newton** adds that...

Law clarifies every transgression. How does the Law do this?

First, as a fence, the Law gives distinct barriers or limits to our behavior. You can look and admire something but "you shall not steal." The law draws a line on how far our behavior can go.

Second, as a spotlight, the Law exposes our guilt when we cross the fence. Imagine a fence with "No Trespassing" signs posted along it. That's the law as a barrier to sin. But if we cross the fence then a giant spotlight suddenly beams in on us, exposing the reality that we crossed the forbidden line. That's why hearing the Law often brings on guilt.

Third, as a video, the Law stands as irrefutable evidence that we are transgressors. In the divine courtroom, the Law replays the act of transgression, assuring our guilt.



Finally, as a verdict, the Law condemns us and calls for wrath. It is not unjust, mind you. The Law calls it as it sees it. ([Sermons from the Epistle to the Romans](#))

**Violation** (3847) (**parabasis** from **para** = beyond, aside + **baino** = step) means to step on one side and thus is primarily a going aside, a stepping across a line, an overstepping or stepping over and always implies a breach of law and especially of the Law of Moses. It refers to the act of a person stepping beyond a fixed limit into forbidden territory. The point is that the law draws the line that should not be crossed or "stepped over". Where there is no law, people do not deliberately disobey God but they disobey in ignorance.

**Parabasis** - 7 times in 7 verses and translated breaking, 1; offense, 1; transgression, 2; transgressions, 2; violation, 1.

**Parabasis** is used once in the non-apocryphal Septuagint - Ps 100:3

Romans 2:23-note You who boast in the Law, through your **breaking** the Law, do you dishonor God?

Romans 4:15-note for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no **violation**.

Romans 5:14-note Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the **offense** of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

Galatians 3:19-note Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

1 Timothy 2:14 And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into **transgression**.

Hebrews 2:2-note For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every **transgression** and disobedience received a just penalty,

Hebrews 9:15-note. For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the **transgressions** that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

**Trench** discussing **parabasis** says that "There must be something to transgress before there can be a transgression. There was sin between Adam and Moses, as was attested by the fact that there was death; but those between the law given in Paradise (Ge 2:16, 17) and the law given from Sinai, sinning indeed, yet did not sin 'after the similitude of Adam's transgression' (or offense = parabasis Romans 5:14-note). With the law came for the first time the possibility of the transgression of law."

**Vincent** adds that "The primary sense of the preposition **para** is beside or by, with reference to a line or extended surface. Hence it indicates that which is not on its true line but beside it, either in the way of falling short or of going beyond... Parabasis differs from the Homeric hyperbasia transgression, in that the latter carries only the idea of going beyond or over. A mark or line as a standard is thus implied. Transgression implies something to transgress. With the law came in the possibility of transgressing the law. "Where there is no law there is no transgression" (Ro 4:15). Hence Adam's sin is called a transgression (Ro 5:14), because it was the violation of a definite command. Paul habitually uses the word and its kindred parabates or transgressor, of the transgression of a commandment distinctly given (Gal 3:19; 1Ti 2:14; Ro 2:25, 27). Hence it is peculiarly appropriate here of one who boasts in the law. It thus differs from **hamartia** or **sin** in that one may **sin** without being under express law. **Sin** (hamartia) was in the world until the law; i.e., during the period prior to the law. Death reigned from Adam to Moses over those who had not sinned (hamartesantas) after the similitude of Adam's transgression (parabaseos). **The sin is implicit, the transgression explicit.**" (Vincent, M. R. Word Studies in the New Testament. Vol. 3, Page 1-31).

**Parabasis** should here be translated by the word "**transgressing**." (Vincent, M: Word Studies)

**Wuest** writes that "The word **parabasis** when used of human conduct, indicates a violation of the rights of others, or of limitations imposed upon one. This word Paul uses (in Gal 3:19-note where Paul writes "**Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions** (parabasis) , **having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made**") to indicate the purpose of the giving of the law. Before the law was given by Moses to Israel, the wrong doing of man was recognized as **hamartia, sin, a deviation from the course of right conduct**. But when the law was given, **sin** was seen to be, not merely the following of evil impulses, but the **violation of explicit law**. Thus, the exceeding sinfulness of sin was recognized by the human race, which otherwise might not have been evident. The **law** therefore was not given because of the existence of transgressions, but to show hamartia (sin) in its true light, an overstepping of what is right into the realm of what is wrong. This revelation of the true nature of sin, would cause man to fear God's wrath, which in turn would give strength to the weakness of man's moral sense and thus educate his conscience and make it more sensitive to sin. The particular phase of the Mosaic law here as well as throughout all of the Galatian letter is the purely mandatory statues of "Thou shalt," and "Thou shalt not."



The law was given therefore to set the stamp of positive transgression upon already existing sin. It was not to give the knowledge of sin as sin, but to show that it was a violation of God's commandments." ([Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament](#))

**Marvin Vincent** (quoting Trench) describes "the mournfully numerous group of words' which express the different aspects of sin. It is **hamartia**, the missing of a mark; **parabasis**, the over passing of a line; **parakoē**, the disobedience to a voice; **paraptōma**, a falling when one should have stood; **agnoēma**, ignorance of what one should know; **hēthēma**, a diminishing of what should be rendered in full measure; **anomia**, or **paranomia** , non-observance of law, **plēmmeleia** , discord."