

Romans 3:20

Greek

20 διότι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, διὰ γὰρ νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας.

NKJV

ESV

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

20 For by works of the law no human being^[a] will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

The purpose of the Law and of all instruction in the Law is that every mouth should be silenced, and that the entire world should become guilty before God. The Law always accuses (Lex semper accusat).

Through the Law comes the knowledge of Sin. Sin is a spiritual disease, a virus that's invaded our humanity and goes right to the very core of our being. The Law is a spiritual MRI that does the deep diagnosis, going beneath the surface, revealing what's wrong at the core. We see sins, and so we figure, we just need a little spiritual nip here and a tuck there, and all will be well. But all is not well. The MRI reveals something deeper, something you can't see or know for yourself. The problem is not your thoughts, words, and deeds. Those are your problems, the symptoms. The problem is Sin dwelling in your members, Sin corrupting your mind, your will, your every thought and desire. We are creatures unbuckled from our Creator, and the Law says you can't live that way. You need to die

If all we had is the Law, we wouldn't want to deal with God. We'd run and hide in the bushes. Luther feared God. He even said he hated God, this righteous terrible Judge sitting on a throne in the clouds with the scales of justice in His hand, weighing sins against merits calculating your years in purgatorial fire.

Luther hated that image of the righteous God who judges the sinner. It brought no comfort, no certainty, no assurance but only increased guilt and misery. He hated the notion that God was righteous. He hated the noise of his conscience drumming away day and night, especially night, reminding him of every sin, every shortcoming, every failure to live up to God's righteous demands and expectations.

And so the law cannot save you. It can only convict you and condemn you, condemn you to death. But through this accusatory work, the law also does you the valuable service of showing you your sins. You see, you need to know that you cannot please God and earn salvation by how well you keep the law. You will never do it well enough! This is essential for you to know, so you don't deceive yourself and delude yourself into thinking you can be righteous enough on your own. You need to be stripped bare of that pretension, so that your ears will be open to hear God's other word to you, namely, the gospel, which is the only place where salvation can indeed be found.