

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Sin Is not Imputed Where There Is No Law.*"

On Sunday mornings we paused our verse-by-verse study through Luke's Gospel for a few sermons on babies going to heaven to set us up to understand **Luke 18:15**. This is where Jesus declared the kingdom of God belongs to babies.

Let's begin with some verses in **Romans 1**.

Anyone familiar with Ray Comfort and Kirk Cameron's *Way of the Master* knows the main point of their strategy is to help people recognize their sinfulness, so they see their need for the Gospel.

Paul takes this approach in Romans. He clearly explains the Gospel in Romans 3 and 4, but before that he shows us our need for the gospel by convincing us of our sinfulness.

We will start at **Romans 1:18** for context.

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

This helps us understand what the gospel does: it delivers us from **the wrath of God**.

Notice the end of the verse says people **suppress the truth**. People can only suppress truth that is known to them. If they were ignorant of the truth they would not be able to suppress it.

The question is, what truth are they suppressing?

The truth that there is a Creator. They deny that God exists.

Romans 1:19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

Notice the phrase **is plain to them**. The truth that God exists is **plain** or obvious. It is not difficult or complicated to believe that God exists. Instead, it is difficult or complicated to believe that God does NOT exist.

How did God plainly reveal his existence to us?

Through creation itself...

Romans 1:20a For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

Pause here.

The phrase **have been clearly perceived** is similar to **is plain to them**.

Creation itself makes the evidence for God overwhelming:

- The painting is evidence there is a painter.
- The building is evidence there is a builder.
- The invention is evidence there is an inventor.

Similarly, creation is evidence there is a Creator.

And not only that, because of the greatness and majesty of creation, it is evidence that the Creator is great and majestic.

In the verse, Paul identifies two things we can learn about God from his creation: he has **eternal power and [a] divine nature**, because only a being with these qualities could create a universe like ours.

—
Think of this verse...

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

When we look at the universe, it gives God's glory. Creation is the display case for God's beauty and attributes.

—
When Isaiah received his famous vision of the throne room of God immediately before his commissioning, he described what the angels were saying...

Isaiah 6:3 One [Angel] called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; THE WHOLE EARTH IS FULL OF HIS GLORY!"

The angels recognize that creation itself reveals God's glory and they worship him for it.

—
Because the evidence for God is so strong, when people deny it, **they [have no] excuse...**

Romans 1:20b So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Notice the verse says **they knew God** because creation revealed it to them.

This reveals that there really is no atheist:

- The problem is not that man does NOT know God.
- The problem is that man does know God, but – as **verse 18** says – he **[suppresses] that truth**. He pushes it down and tries to deny it.

—
We are told why man does this...

He doesn't want to give God two things he deserves. In **verse 21**, what are the two things God deserves?

First, he because of God's greatness he deserves to be **honored**, or worshiped.

Second, because of what God has done for us, he deserves to be **[given] thanks**.

If you think about it, it is actually unbelievable that people are not thankful to God. He has given us life, families, children, a beautiful world to live in, and most importantly, a Son who will take the punishment we deserve. Ingratitude is one of our worst sins.

—
When man rejects God, he becomes **futile in [his] thinking**. He believes absurd things like:

- We came from fish and apes.
- The universe created itself through an explosion.

This is futile, or **[foolish]**, thinking, as the next verse says...

Romans 1:22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

Last Sunday night we watched Evolution Versus God. One of the common themes with many of the individuals who were interviewed who identify as atheists is they **[claim] to be wise**. This was a commonality among them.

But in the process, they revealed their [foolishness].

Now what does this have to do with babies?

These verses can't apply to babies, and this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson One: Babies haven't committed disqualifying sins.

By disqualifying, I mean disqualifying from heaven. Babies haven't committed sins that disqualify them from heaven.

For example, in this passage, man is condemned if he doesn't:

1. Recognize creation has a Creator
2. **Honor** or worship God
3. Give God **thanks**.

But it's hard to argue that babies could do these things...especially while they're still in the womb!

Babies don't move around in the amniotic fluid thinking, "*Wow this is amazing. Somehow I was created and that Creator must be amazing!*"

Let me show you something similar.

Turn one book to the right to **1 Corinthians 6:9**.

Numerous places in Scripture reveal people don't inherit the Kingdom of God because of sins they commit. For example...

1 Corinthians 6:9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.ⁱ

We see something similar in **Galatians 5:19-21** and **Ephesians 5:5**.

Stay here in **1 Corinthians 6** because there's one more verse I want to show you, but for now listen to these verses from Revelation that describe people in hell...

Revelation 21:8 The cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

Just like the people in **1 Corinthians** do not inherit the Kingdom of God because of the sins they committed, this these people find themselves in the lake of fire because of the sins they committed.

This is pretty concerning considering all of us, if we are honest, recognize we have committed many of these sins. We are the people described in these verses.

That means if we don't repent and stop being these people then:

- We also will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- We also will find ourselves in the lake of fire.

That's why **1 Corinthians 6:11** says...

1 Corinthians 6:11 And SUCH WERE SOME OF YOU. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Through repentance and faith in Christ, we stopped being these people. We were born again. As the verse says, we **were washed, sanctified, and justified.**

We have become new creations...

2 Corinthians 5: 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

—
Now, what does this have to do with babies?

The verses in **1 Corinthians 6** and **Revelation 21** are not just saying these people DID these things. They are saying these people ARE these things. God sends people to hell not just for committing these sins, but for being these sinners.

But I can't imagine anyone arguing that a baby IS one of these sinners.

When babies scream and keep us up all night, we might be tempted to look at them and say they are lots of things, such as:

- Difficult
- Trying
- Exhausting
- Wearying
- Draining
- Fatiguing

But nobody ever looks at babies and says they are **fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, drunkards, sorcerers, extortioners, or revilers.**

In other words, babies haven't committed sins disqualifying them from inheriting the kingdom of God.

—
And these verses complement Jesus's words well, which we will look at when we go back to Luke:

- These verses are about people who will NOT inherit the kingdom of God.
- But Jesus said babies WILL inherit the kingdom of God: **Luke 18:16 "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God."** In other words, the kingdom of God belongs to babies and those like them.

—
R.A. Webb wrote a book called [The Theology of Infant Salvation](#). Here's a quote...

"If an infant went to hell for no other reason than original sin...it would know suffering but it would have no understanding of the reason for its suffering...the whole meaning and significance of its suffering would be to [the baby] a conscious mystery...Such an infant would know it was in hell, but it would not be able to explain why it was there."

R.A. Webb's point is because an infant hasn't consciously engaged in sin, there would be no understanding of having disobeyed God; therefore, there would be no understanding of God's judgment and why it's in hell.

—
Now one of the things you might have noticed is R.A. Webb mentioned original sin. Understanding original sin is important to the discussion of babies going to heaven, because there is a nagging question...

Even if babies in the womb have not sinned, we still know that they have a sin nature.

And this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Two: Sin nature is different than sinning.

Original sin refers to the original sin Adam committed that gave all of us sin natures. It is the moral corruption we possess that produces a disposition toward habitually sinful behavior.

It is what God was talking about when he said...

Genesis 8:21 The intention of man's heart is evil FROM HIS YOUTH.

We see it with our children. We don't have to teach our children to sin. We must teach them NOT to sin. We don't have to teach our kids not to lie, make excuses, get upset, or mistreat each other. They do this all on their own without any instruction.

But, having a sin nature, or propensity toward sin, is not the same as sinning. We have sin natures, but it doesn't mean we sin every second.

Let's consider the strongest verses about our sin natures...

Psalm 51:5 [David said,] "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Most scholars believe David was lamenting being conceived with a sin nature...versus confessing sin he committed in the womb.

Another psalm David wrote seems to substantiate this...

Psalm 58:3 The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.

In two different ways David says the same thing about wicked people:

- They **are estranged from (or after) the womb.**
- They **go astray from (or after) birth.**

The important point to notice is that even wicked people are not **estranged IN** the womb. They do not go **astray** until **AFTER** they are born.

But it begs the question:

- What happens **AFTER** the womb?
- If babies go astray when they are born, could they go to hell?

The answer is no, because sin is not imputed to them...and this brings us to lesson three...

Lesson Three: Sin is not imputed to babies.

Let me briefly explain imputation because it's not a word we commonly use...

Impute means to credit or charge an action to someone else.

We have already talked about one of the most common examples in Scripture:

- Adam's sin was imputed, or credited, to all his descendants.

- Adam's sin is reckoned to us as though we did it.
- Adam's sin became our sin.

This does not mean that we committed Adam's sin ourselves, but it does mean we are as guilty as Adam.

Because Adam's sin is imputed to us, we receive the same penalty Adam received: death.

—
One example of imputation occurs with Paul when he wants Philemon to receive Onesimus. Onesimus wronged Philemon, and listen to the way Paul wrote to Philemon...

Philemon 18 If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, CHARGE THAT TO MY ACCOUNT...19b will repay it.

This is imputation!

Paul says, "*Charge me whatever he owes. Put that to my account. I will repay whatever he owes. You can put that to his account*"

This resembles the double imputation that occurs with Christ:

- Our sin is imputed, or put, to his account.
- His righteousness is imputed, or put, to our account.

This is the heart of the gospel...

2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake [God] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God.

—
Now, for this morning's sermon, let me say it two ways:

- Sin is imputed to people when they have knowledge of sin.
- Sin is NOT imputed – or at least not in the same way – when people lack knowledge.

Let me provide verses that support this.

First, look at **Romans 3:20**...

Romans 3:20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

The **law** Paul is referring to is the Old Covenant Law that was given to Moses on Sinai.

We have talked about this numerous times that the law reveals sin. The law tells us what we are doing is wrong.

—
But the other side of this is that without the law there is no sin. Look one chapter to the right at **Romans 4:15**...

Romans 4:15 For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

The law brings wrath in that the law reveals sin, and when there is sin, God's wrath is against it.

But **where there is no law, there is no transgression**, or no sin.

—
Now, this is the first of two times Paul says something that can't be as literal as it sounds. We know there was sin when there was no law, or there was sin before the law was given:

- Cain murdered Abel

- Noah got drunk
- Sodom and Gomorrah engaged in homosexuality

So, what exactly does it mean when it says **where there is no law there is no transgression**?

It means:

- Sin is not imputed where there is no law
- Sin is not counted without the law

Look one chapter to the right. We will start at **verse 12** for context...

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

This refers to Adam's sin that brought death to all men.

Romans 5:13 for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but SIN IS NOT COUNTED WHERE THERE IS NO LAW.

This is what it means in **Romans 4:15** when it says **where there is no law there is no transgression**. It means **sin is not counted where there is no law**.

There was sin in the world before God gave the law. But sin is not imputed when there is no law, or as the verse says, **sin is not counted [against people] where there is no law**.

—
Now let's bring this back to babies...

We have discussed that babies are the picture of selfishness:

- They think only about themselves.
- They never pity their parents whom they keep up all night.
- They don't feel bad about the messes they make.
- They throw fits, yell, and scream when they don't get what they want.

There's no denying that this behavior is wrong. We are not going to look at what babies do and say that it is acceptable.

So why aren't babies held accountable for their behavior?

For lack of a better way to say it...

How do we explain babies acting so terribly, but it not being held against them?

As we just read...

The law allows sin to be imputed, but babies don't have the law. This is why their sin is not imputed to them.

—
Now if we go back to **Romans 5:13** this is the second thing Paul says that we know can't be as literal as it sounds, because God DID count people's sin against them prior to the law:

- He judged Cain for murdering Abel
- He judged Sodom and Gomorrah for engaging in homosexuality.

So, how could God judge people who didn't have the law?

We know from a previous sermon that they still had their consciences, which served as a law to them...

Romans 2:14 Gentiles, who do not have the law...**ARE A LAW TO THEMSELVES**, even though they do not have the law. **15...THEIR CONSCIENCE** also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.

Their consciences serve as a law, telling them right from wrong, but they still choose wrong.

Romans 4:15 says **the law brings wrath** and their conscience serves as a law bringing wrath against them just as much as the Mosaic law brings wrath against its violators.

—
Now, John MacArthur said **Romans 5:12-14** is often overlooked because of its complexity.

Much of the complexity comes from Paul saying things that aren't literal:

- We know in **Romans 5:12** that it's not literal that there is no sin without the law...because there was sin before the law was given to Moses.
- We know in **Romans 5:13** that it's not literal that God does not impute sin without the law...because God did impute sin before the law was given to Moses.

So, why did Paul write two things that don't mean what they sound like they mean?

Because he has a point he wants to make, and he must say all this to set up that point.

I'm going to ask you three questions that tie all this together and help you understand the point Paul wants to make...

First, based on **Romans 3:20** what does the law bring?

The law brings sin, or at least reveals it.

Second, what does sin bring?

Sin brings death.ⁱⁱ

Third, and here is the tough question...

If there is no law, there is no sin, and if there is no sin, what should there not be any of?

Death!

If the law brings sin, and sin brings death, but there is no law, there should be no sin. And if there is no sin, there should be no death.

In other words, during human history, there should have been one season of time that there was no death: from Adam until the law was given to Moses at Sinai.

Adam died because he disobeyed God's law. Adam was created around 4,000BC. The Law was given to Moses around 1,500 BC. From 4,000BC to 1,500BC, there was no law...so there should have been no sin...so there should have been no death.

So, why was there still death during these 2,500 years from Adam to Moses?

That is exactly the question Paul answers in the next verse...

Romans 5:14a Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam (which simply means those who didn't sin like Adam sinned)

Pause here. This means death existed from Adam to Moses, or death reigned from Adam until the law was given, even though all these people did not sin like Adam sinned.

When Adam sinned he disobeyed a direct command or Law of God...and the people who sinned after the law was given sinned by disobeying a direct command or law of God.

But all the people from Adam to Moses didn't disobey any law because there wasn't one yet.

But they still died, because of original sin. They died, not only because of their own personal sin, but because they were Adam's descendants.

Hypothetically, even if people didn't sin, they would still die because of original sin...and this brings us to lesson four...

Lesson Four: Babies die because of original sin.

You could have been wondering...

"What in the world does this have to do with babies going to heaven?"

This has much to do with babies going to heaven!

I have been telling you babies haven't sinned. You know your Bibles, so you say...

"Sin brings death. If babies haven't sinned, then why do they die?"

Babies die, even in the womb, not because of their own personal sin, but because of original sin. They die because they are Adam's descendants. They die for the same reason people died from Adam to Moses.

—
This also explains why Jesus, born of a woman, but not of a man, did NOT have to die...

Think about this...

If Jesus had been born of a woman AND A MAN, he would have had to die because of original sin. But because of the virgin birth he was able to avoid original sin. And because he then lived a sinless life, he did not deserve to die.

—
You know I love types, and we will conclude with one about Jesus. Look at the rest of **Romans 5:14**...

Romans 5:14b [Adam] who was a type of the one who was to come (referring to Jesus).

Let me briefly explain the ways Adam is a type of Jesus...

First, Adam and Jesus were the only two people created without a sin nature, making them completely unique to the rest of mankind.

Second, through one act Adam and Jesus both introduced unimaginable consequences for all mankind...in fact, nobody has affected all of humanity more than these two men:

- Adam, by one act brought death to everyone.
- Jesus, by one act brought life to all who believe in him.

Third, Adam and Jesus both freely “gave something” to all of us:

- Adam’s sin nature is freely given or imputed to us.
- Jesus’ righteousness CAN be freely given or imputed to us by faith.

Look at **Romans 5:15...**

Romans 5:15 But the free gift (what Jesus gave us) is not like the trespass (the sin Adam committed). For if many died through one man's trespass (Adam's sin), much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

Even though Adam and Jesus both give us something, what they give us is completely different: the gift of eternal life Jesus gives is the opposite of the sin producing death that Adam gave us.

—
To receive the sin nature Adam gave you, you didn’t have to do anything except be born.

But to receive the gift Jesus of eternal life Jesus offers, you must repent and believe. Then you can be born again.

—
If you have any questions or I can pray for you in any way, I’ll be up front after service and it would be a privilege to speak with you.

Let’s pray.

ⁱ Ephesians 5:5 Everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Galatians 5:19 sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do[b] such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

ⁱⁱ These verses make the same point:

- **Romans 6:23 The wages of sin is death**
- **James 1:15 Sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.**