

Fr. Perozich comments —

Those in the church promoting sexual license and decrying the death penalty as mortal sin, often use sophistry - a twisting of the truth-, euphemisms - a softening of the truth -, and slogans - cleverly worded phrases to end discussion.

Dr. Matthew Tsakanikas demolishes the sophistries with the bible and clear explanations in the article below.

The Wrath of God and the Death Penalty: On Blessings and Prudence

While sexual immorality no longer requires the civil punishment of death, such natural-moral-law violations still bring spiritual death to the souls of those who willingly engage in it.



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[Matthew A. Tsakanikas](#)

St. Paul's discussion in Romans 1 on "the wrath of God" is best understood through the lens of Acts 15. Such an exegesis sheds light on the natural moral law and reveals the need to avoid blessing sin.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18). After explaining how wicked and contrary to goodness and intelligence homosexual acts are (1:26-28), and how they lead to further evils (1:29-30), St. Paul concluded Romans 1 by warning against giving approval to any

evil activity: “Though they know God’s decree that those who do such things deserve to die, [the wicked] not only do them but approve those who practice them” (Romans 1:32).

In Romans 1, St. Paul’s condemnations of homosexual acts (among other sins) were not personal opinions or a form of bigotry. He reiterated the apostolic condemnations of perverse forms of sexual immorality (in Greek: πορνείας, transliterated *porneias*). The council of apostles in Jerusalem renewed condemnations of sexual sins in the general category of “unchastity”: Christians must “abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity [πορνείας]” (Acts 20:15). Acts of unchastity are contrary to the natural moral law which demands truthfulness and justice in human relationships.

Sinners Deserved Death? Romans 1:32 and Romans 13:4

In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul mentioned the seriousness of death for any sexual sinners because such activities harm health (spread disease and death), are contrary to reason and truthfulness (harming the mind and emotions), violate the goods of marriage (opposing natural law that good is to be done and evil avoided), and because **God said that such freely chosen kinds of behavior deserved the death penalty in the Book of Leviticus (as already alluded to in Exodus 22:19)**. The idolatry and orgy at the time of the golden calf incident at Mount Sinai may have played a part in this ancient civil-law penalty of death being detailed more in Leviticus.

In God’s amendment to the Exodus covenant—which followed the golden calf (and the Levites slaying everyone involved)—the death penalty in Levitical law was a specifically prudential matter for civil law to enforce the covenant begun at Sinai. Sometimes banishment was an alternative. God was clear that He was

expelling the former inhabitants of Canaan from the land especially for sexual violations of the natural moral law (Leviticus 18:24). God ordered that they should be killed if they would not leave. Obviously, in the time of Abraham, God killed all the inhabitants of Sodom for their sexual deviancy which had thoroughly perverted them.

Penalties of civil law in the Old Testament are not necessary to be kept in the New Testament times. Jesus saved the adulterous woman from being stoned to death and showed that civil law is a matter of prudential decision. Severe penalties should be a last resort. The death penalty is dependent on many social and politico-economic conditions. Sexual sins and adultery violate friendships and lead to treating people like objects that can be discarded. Treating humans as objects of use leads to the corruption of culture: the cruelty of sexual slavery and murdering the children born from insincere (dishonest) sexual relations, and so forth. The prophets always stated the principle: “they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands” (Ezekiel 23:37a). Adultery and hardening of hearts lead to the blood of abortion (child sacrifice), as one example (cf. Ezekiel 23:37b).

It has always been the Christian tradition that natural moral law can be distinguished from civil and ritual (ceremonial) laws even though they relate to one another. **The civil law of the death penalty is not necessary for sexual sins (morals which affect the goodness of our will), but this does not mean States are forbidden to exercise the death penalty.** Romans 13:4 is clear: the State “is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain.” During the era of the Book of Numbers, grave reasons, cohesive military discipline, and especially living in the presence of God’s tabernacle necessitated more reliance on the death penalty.

The Israelites had just been extracted from the lustful culture and territory of the Egyptians but due to bad habits still wanted to live like Egyptians instead of in justice. God would not tolerate Israel's remaining in sin (Leviticus 18:3) since He now dwelt (tabernacled) in the center of their encampments. Breaking Israel's acceptance of sin and deviancy required the threat of death to restore them to holiness and keep them of sober mind. It was needed to keep good order during 40 years of military campaigns on the way to the Promised Land. Afterward, it was needed for 400 years of acquiring control of the Promised Land. God's tabernacling presence in their midst required disciplined moral and ceremonial living (cf. Leviticus 19:2).

Mortal Sin, Spiritual Death Penalty

According to the New Covenant and council of the apostles in Acts 15:20, Gentile converts to Christianity did not have to follow the ceremonial laws of circumcision, now replaced by Baptism. Nor did anyone need to enforce the civil punishments of Leviticus since God dwelled among Christians in a new way. **Keeping the Ten Commandments and aspects of natural moral law in Leviticus, Christians still had to “abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity [πορνείας] and from what is strangled and from blood [i.e., witchcraft practices related to idolatry per Leviticus 19:26]” (Acts 15:20).**

While idolatry, sexual immorality, and witchcraft [sorcery] no longer required the civil punishment of death, such natural-moral-law violations still brought spiritual death to the souls of those who willingly did these. The sins mentioned in Acts 15:20 brought *death* (in Latin: *mort*) to souls who engaged in them (***death to friendship with God***). They became known as ***mortal sins***: “There is sin

which is mortal; I do not say that one is to pray for that” (1 John 5:16). Christians could not go to Holy Communion—the new tabernacling presence of God—without first repenting of unchastity (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:4-5). This is why St. Paul warned of God’s wrath and death for Christians approaching God without repentance from sins (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:29-30).

Acts 15:20 emphasized parts of the Old Testament moral law from Leviticus which constituted the natural moral law of piety toward God and justice toward one’s neighbor. Violations of these laws work against authentic love of God and neighbor; against one’s own goodness and intelligence, the image and likeness of God. **Those who committed sexual perversity were forbidden to live in the Promised Land (Leviticus 18:24). Likewise, those who live by sexual perversity cannot abide in Heaven.** They are barred from Heaven (life inside God’s Will) which is anticipated in Holy Communion. Clinging to unchastity rejects God’s way of living by truth, reasonableness, and goodness (God’s Will). **Such sinners are at enmity with God even though God loves them and wants them to embrace Him. All mortal sins have this effect.**

Natural Moral Law of Leviticus Continues in Acts and the Church

When the Greek term “unchastity” [πορνείας] is used by Jesus, St. Paul, or the other apostles as in Acts 15, it is a reference to Levitical laws (Leviticus 18-20) that forbade various sexual relations.¹ Such relations remain irreconcilable with reason and contrary to the revelation of God’s will for man and woman. The outlawed sexual relations belong to the natural moral law—to piety and to justice. Natural moral law is not something simply imposed from outside of us, it is evident to human intelligence (Romans 1:19), experience, and the desire for truth and justice. It is about what we naturally

desire for our perfection. Moral law is about piety toward God and God’s plan in creation; it is about the justice of loving one’s neighbor as one’s self in honesty and truthfulness.

St. Paul’s elaborations upon Acts 15 are reiterated at the very end of the New Testament: “fornicators [unchastity], sorcerers [witchcraft & blood per Leviticus 19:26], and idolaters [stealing worship from God], *and all liars*, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire” (Revelation 21:8; emphasis added). Such sins make one dishonest and unjust—liars. **St. Paul’s teaching in Romans 1 is about loving in the truth. It is a faithful witness to Jesus’ own teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and Revelation 21. Faith in Jesus enables us to keep and uphold the natural moral law and to reject sexual immorality. Those held in the grip of sexual sins should pray for “love of the truth” (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:10) and know that through such perseverance in prayer God will free them from sin (cf. Matthew 7:11) and bring peace.**

In Romans 1, St. Paul warned about the wrath of God for those who partake in unchastity and condone it. What will God do to his people when they attempt to bless “couples” who base their relationships on unchastity and lewdness [cf. Ezekiel 23:44-49]? Prudence reminds us that it is best to bless an individual seeking repentance rather than bless such “couples” and bring the wrath of God.

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1. cf.: Paul Mankowski, “The Dominical Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage: The Biblical Data,” in *Remaining in the Truth of Christ: Marriage and Communion in the Catholic Church*, ed. Robert Dodaro (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014), pp. 36-63 at 62.