

QUESTION 106

The Law of the Gospel, Called the New Law, in Itself

Next we have to consider the Law of the Gospel, which is called the New Law. First, we will consider it in itself (question 106). Second, we will consider it in relation to the Old Law (question 107). Third, we will consider the things contained in the New Law (question 108).

On the first topic there are four questions: (1) What sort of law is it? More specifically, is it a written law or an infused law? (2) As to its power, does it confer justification? (3) As to its beginning, should it have been given from the beginning of the world? (4) As to its end, will it last until the end, or should another law succeed it?

Article 1

Is the New Law a written law?

It seems that the New Law is a written law:

Objection 1: The New Law is the Gospel itself. But the Gospel has been written down; for John 20:31 says, “These things have been written in order that you might believe.” Therefore, the New Law is a written law.

Objection 2: An instilled law (*lex indita*) is a law of nature—this according to Romans 2:14-15 (“They do by nature what belongs to the law ... They have the work of the law written in their hearts”). Therefore, if the Law of the Gospel were an instilled law, then it would not differ from the law of nature.

Objection 3: The Law of the Gospel belongs only to those who are in the status of the New Covenant. But an instilled law is common both to those in the status of the New Covenant and to those in the status of the Old Covenant; for Wisdom 7:27 says that divine wisdom “conveys herself throughout the nations into holy souls, and she establishes the friends of God and the prophets.” Therefore, the New Law is not an instilled law.

But contrary to this: The New Law is the Law of the New Covenant. But the Law of the New Covenant is instilled in the heart. For in Hebrews 8:8-10 the Apostle, citing the authority of Jeremiah 31:31-33 (“Behold the days shall come, says the Lord, and I will consummate a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ...”), goes on to explain what this covenant is in the following words: “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel by putting my laws in their minds, and I will write my laws in their heart.” Therefore, the New Law is an instilled law.

I respond: As the Philosopher puts it in *Ethics* 9, “Each thing seems to be that which is most prominent in it.” But that which is most prominent in the Law of the New Covenant and in which its power consists is the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is given through faith in Christ. And so the New Law is in the first instance the very grace of the Holy Spirit that is given to those who believe in Christ (*datur Christi fidelibus*).

This is manifestly apparent from the Apostle, who in Romans 3:27 says, “Where, then, is your boasting? It is excluded. By what law? The law of works? No, but by the law of faith.” For he calls the very grace of faith a law. And in Romans 8:2 he says even more clearly, “The Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed me from the Law of sin and death.” Thus, in *De Spiritu et Littera* Augustine says, “Just as the Law of works was written on tablets of stone, so the Law of faith has been written in the hearts of the faithful.” And elsewhere in the same book he says, “What else are the laws of God written by God in our hearts than the very presence of the Holy Spirit?”

Still, the New Law contains certain elements that *dispose* us toward the grace of the Holy Spirit and certain elements that have to do with the *use* of that grace. These elements are, as it were, secondary

aspects of the New Law, about which those who believe in Christ have to be instructed, through both the spoken word and the written word, regarding what they ought to believe and what they ought to do. And so one should reply that the New Law is in the first instance an instilled law, but that, secondarily, it is a written law.

Reply to objection 1: The Scriptures of the Gospel contain only things that pertain to the grace of the Holy Spirit, either in the sense that they dispose us toward that grace or in the sense that they direct us in the use of that grace.

In order to dispose our understanding through the faith by which the grace of the Holy Spirit is given, the Gospel contains things that involve the manifestation of either Christ's divinity or His humanity. Again, in order to dispose our affections, the Gospel contains things which involve that hatred of the world through which a man comes to have a capacity for the grace of the Holy Spirit. For as John 14:17 says, "The world [read: lovers of the world] cannot take in (*capere*) the Holy Spirit."

On the other hand, the use of spiritual grace occurs in the works of the virtues, which the Scriptures of the New Testament exhort men to in many ways.

Reply to objection 2: There are two senses in which something is instilled (*inditum*) into a man.

The first sense has to do with human nature, and it is in this sense that the natural law is a law which is instilled in a man.

In the second sense, what is instilled in a man is, as it were, something added to his nature through the gift of grace. And this is the sense in which the New Law is instilled in a man, not only pointing out what is to be done, but also helping him to do it.

Reply to objection 3: No one has ever had the grace of the Holy Spirit except through explicit or implicit faith in Christ. But it is through faith in Christ that a man belongs to the New Covenant. Hence, if anyone has had the Law of grace instilled in him, then he thereby belonged to the New Covenant.

Article 2

Does the New Law confer justification?

It seems that the New Law does not confer justification:

Objection 1: No one is justified unless he obeys God's law—this according to Hebrews 5:9 ("He, viz., Christ, has become to all who obey Him the cause of eternal salvation"). But the Gospel does not always bring it about that men obey it; for Romans 10:16 says, "Not everyone obeys the Gospel." Therefore, the New Law does not confer justification.

Objection 2: In Romans the Apostle proves that the Old Law did not confer justification from the fact that after it came, transgression increased; for Romans 4:15 says, "The Law makes for wrath, since where there is no law, there is no transgression, either." But the New Law increases transgression even more, since one who continues to sin after the New Law has been given is deserving of even more punishment—this according to Hebrews 10:28-29 ("One who invalidates the Law of Moses dies without any mercy at the word of two or three witnesses. How much more, do you think, does he who tramples upon the Son of God deserve worse punishments?"). Therefore, the New Law, like the Old Law, fails to confer justification.

Objection 3: Conferring justification is an effect that belongs properly to God—this according to Romans 8:33 ("It is God who confers justification"). But the Old Law was from God, just as the New Law is. Therefore, the New Law does not confer justification any more than the Old Law did.

But contrary to this: In Romans 1:16 the Apostle says, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, since it

is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.” But salvation comes only to those on whom justification has been conferred. Therefore, the Law of the Gospel confers justification.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), there are two elements involved in the New Law.

The first, and principal, element is the very grace of the Holy Spirit, which is given inwardly. And on this score, the New Law confers justification. Hence, in *De Spiritu et Littera* Augustine says, “There, viz., under the Old Covenant, a Law is posited outwardly by which the unjust are made fearful, whereas here, viz., in the New Covenant, a Law is given inwardly by which the unjust are justified.”

The other element involves the Law of the Gospel in a secondary way, viz., the documents of the faith and the precepts that direct human affections and human actions. On this score, the New Law does not confer justification. Hence, in 2 Corinthians 3:6 the Apostle says, “The letter kills, but the spirit gives life.” In *De Spiritu et Littera* Augustine explains that by ‘the letter’ is meant any writing that exists exterior to men, even the writing of the moral precepts contained in the Gospel. Hence, even the letter of the Gospel kills unless the healing grace of faith is inwardly present.

Reply to objection 1: This objection goes through in the case of the New Law not with respect to what is primary in it, but with respect to what is secondary in it, viz., the documents and precepts that are proposed to man exteriorly either by the spoken word or by the written word.

Reply to objection 2: Even if the grace of the New Covenant helps a man not to sin, it nonetheless does not confirm a man in the good, so that he is unable to sin. For this belongs to the state of glory. And so if anyone sins after having received the grace of the New Covenant, he deserves a greater punishment because he is ungrateful for greater blessings and is not using the help that has been given to him. However, the New Law is not said to “work wrath” because of this, since the New Law of itself gives help that is sufficient for not sinning.

Reply to objection 3: The one God gave both the New Law and the Old Law, but in different ways. For He gave the Old Law as written on stone tablets, whereas He gave the New Law as written on “the fleshy tablets of the heart,” as the Apostle puts it in 2 Corinthians 3:3. Furthermore, as Augustine says in *De Spiritu et Littera*, “The Apostle calls *that* letter, written outside of man, both a ministration of death and a ministration of damnation. *This* letter, however, viz., the Law of the New Covenant, he calls a ministration of the Spirit and a ministration of justification, since it is through the gift of the Spirit that we work justice and are freed from the damnation of transgression.”

Article 3

Should the New Law have been given from the beginning?

It seems that the New Law should have been given from the beginning:

Objection 1: As Romans 2:11 says, “There is no respecting of persons with God.” But as Romans 3:23 says, “All men have sinned and need the glory of God.” Therefore the Law of the Gospel should have been given from the beginning of the world, in order that all might have been helped by it.

Objection 2: Just as different men live in different places, so too they live at different times. But God—who, as 1 Timothy 2:4 says, wills all men to be saved—commanded that the Gospel should be preached in all places, as is clear from Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15. Therefore, the Law of the Gospel should have been present at all times, with the result that it should have been given from the beginning of the world.

Objection 3: Spiritual salvation, which is eternal, is more necessary for man than is corporeal salvation, which is temporal. But as is clear from Genesis 1, from the beginning of the world God

provided man with those things necessary for corporeal salvation by giving him power over all the things that had been created for the sake of man. Therefore, the New Law, which is especially necessary for spiritual salvation, should have been given to man from the beginning of the world.

But contrary to this: In 1 Corinthians 15:46 the Apostle says, “That which is spiritual was not first, but instead that which is animal.” But the New Law is more spiritual than anything else is. Therefore, the New Law should not have been given from the beginning of the world.

I respond: Three reasons can be cited for why the New Law should not have been given from the beginning of the world.

The first is that, as has been explained (a. 1), the New Law is in the first instance the grace of the Holy Spirit, which could not have been given in abundance until the obstacle of sin had been removed from the human race by the consummation of redemption through Christ. Hence, John 7:39 says, “The Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.” And this is the reason clearly stated by the Apostle in Romans 8, where, after having begun by talking about the “law of the Spirit of life,” he added, “God, in sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the sake of sin, condemned sin in the flesh in order that the justification of the Law might be fulfilled in us.”

The second reason that can be given is based on the perfection of the New Law. For a thing is not brought to perfection immediately from the beginning; rather, it is brought to perfection with a certain temporal order of succession, in the way that someone is first a boy and later a man. The Apostle cites this reason in Galatians 3:24-25: “The Law was our teacher in Christ, in order that we might be justified by faith. But when faith arrives, we are no longer under the teacher.”

The third reason is based on the fact that the New Law is a law of grace, and so it was first required that man should be left to himself in the state of the Old Law, in order that, falling into sin and seeing his own weakness, he might recognize that he needed grace. It is this reason that the Apostle cites in Romans 5:20, where he says, “The Law entered in so that sin might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did more abound.”

Reply to objection 1: Because of the sin of its first parent, the human race deserved to be deprived of the assistance of grace. And so as Augustine says in *De Perfectione Iustitiae*, “If grace is not given to someone, this is out of justice, whereas if grace is given to someone, this is out of mercy (*ex gratia*).” Hence, the fact that God did not confer the Law of grace on everyone from the beginning of the world does not involve His being a respecter of persons. For as has been explained, grace had to be conferred in due order.

Reply to objection 2: A diversity of locations does not change the status of the human race; rather, this status varies through temporal succession. And so the New Law is proposed to all locations, but not at all times, even though, as was explained above (a. 1, ad 3), at every time there have been some who belong to the New Covenant.

Reply to objection 3: Things having to do with corporeal salvation aid man with respect to his nature, which is not destroyed through sin. By contrast, things having to do with spiritual salvation are ordered toward grace, which is lost through sin. And so the arguments in the two cases are not parallel.

Article 4

Will the New Law last until the end of the world?

It seems that the New Law will not last until the end of the world:

Objection 1: In 1 Corinthians 13:10 the Apostle says, “When that which is complete (*perfectum*)

has come, then that which is partial will be done away with.” But the New Law is partial (*ex parte*); for in the same place the Apostle says, “We know in part, and we prophesy in part.” Therefore, the New Law will have to be done away with when another, more complete, state succeeds it.

Objection 2: In John 16:13 our Lord promised His disciples that they would know “all truth” at the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. But the Church does not yet know all truth within the state of the New Covenant. Therefore, another state is to be expected in which all truth will be manifested through the Holy Spirit.

Objection 3: Just as the Father is other than (*alius a*) than the Son, and the Son is other than the Father, so too the Holy Spirit is other than the Father and the Son. But there was a status corresponding to the person of the Father, viz., the status of the Old Law, in which men tended toward generating children. Similarly, there is likewise a status corresponding to the person of Son, viz., the status of the New Law, in which the leaders are clerics tending toward wisdom, which is appropriated to the Son. Therefore, there will be a third status of the Holy Spirit, in which spiritual men will lead.

Objection 4: In Matthew 24:14 our Lord says, “The Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world, and then the consummation will come.” But the Gospel of Christ has long since been preached in the whole world, and yet the consummation has not yet come. Therefore, the Gospel of Christ is not the Gospel of the kingdom; rather, there will be another Gospel, the Gospel of the Holy Spirit—another Law, as it were.

But contrary to this: In Matthew 24:34 our Lord says, “I tell you that this generation will not pass away until all these things have been accomplished.” Chrysostom explains that this refers to “the generation of those who believe in Christ.” Therefore, the status of those who believe in Christ will remain until the consummation of the world.

I respond: There are two senses in which the status of the world can vary.

One sense corresponds to the differences among the *laws*. And in this sense there will be no other status succeeding the present status of the New Law. For the status of the New Law succeeded the status of the Old Law in the way that the more perfect succeeds the less perfect. But no status of the present life can be more perfect than the status of the New Law. For there can be nothing closer to the ultimate end than that which immediately leads up to the ultimate end. But this is what the New Law does; hence, in Hebrews 10:19-22 the Apostle says, “And so, brothers, having confidence in our entry into the Holy of Holies through the blood of Christ, a new way that He has opened for us ... let us draw near to Him.” Hence, there can be no more perfect state of the present life than the status of the New Law, since the more perfect a given thing is, the closer it is to the ultimate end.

Second, the status of *men* can vary in a way corresponding to the different ways in which men are related to the same law, be it a more perfect or a less perfect law. And in this sense the status of the Old Law changed quite often. For sometimes the laws were kept very well, whereas at other times they were completely ignored. In this sense, the status of the New Law varies as well in a way corresponding to different places and times and persons, insofar as the grace of the Holy Spirit is had in a more perfect or less perfect way by given individuals.

However, one should not expect there to be some future status in which the grace of the Holy Spirit is had in a more perfect way than it has been had up to now—especially by the apostles, who received the first fruits of the Spirit, i.e., who “received them first in time and more abundantly than others,” as a Gloss on Romans 8:23 puts it.

Reply to objection 1: As Dionysius says in *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, there are three statuses: first, the status of the Old Law; second, the status of the New Law; the third status comes afterwards, not in this life, but in heaven (*in patria*). But just as the first status is figurative and imperfect with respect to the status of the Gospel, so too the latter status is figurative and imperfect with respect to the status of

heaven. When this last status arrives, the present status will be done away with, just as we read in the same place, “Now we see darkly through a mirror, then we shall see face to face.”

Reply to objection 2: As Augustine reports in *Contra Faustum*, Montanus and Priscilla claimed that our Lord’s promise to give the Holy Spirit was brought to fulfillment not in the apostles, but in themselves. Similarly, the Manicheans claimed that it was brought to fulfillment in Manes, whom they claimed to be the spirit Paraclete. And so in both cases they refused to accept the Acts of the Apostles, in which it is manifestly shown that this promise was brought to fulfillment in the apostles, just as our Lord promised them again in Acts 1:5 (“You shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit, not many days from now”) and which Acts 2 says was fulfilled.

But these falsehoods are ruled out by the fact that John 7:39 says, “The Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.” From this it is understood that the Holy Spirit was given immediately upon Christ’s being glorified in His resurrection and ascension. This also rules out the empty notions of anyone who claims that another era of the Holy Spirit is to be expected.

Now the Holy Spirit taught the apostles all truth concerning those things that are necessary for salvation (*quae pertinent ad necessitatem salutis*)—more specifically, what is to be believed and what is to be done. However, He did not teach them about all future events, since this was not relevant to them—this according to Acts 1:7 (“It is not for you to know the times or moments which the Father has reserved for His own power.”)

Reply to objection 3: The Old Law belonged not only to the Father but also to the Son, since the Old Law was a figure of Christ. Hence, in John 5:46 our Lord says, “If you believed Moses, you would perhaps believe me as well, since he wrote about me.”

Similarly, the New Law belongs not only to Christ but also to the Holy Spirit—this according to Romans 8:2 (“The Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” and so on). Hence, another law which is a law of the Holy Spirit is not to be expected.

Reply to objection 4: Since it was at the very beginning of the preaching of the Gospel that Christ said, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand,” it would be utterly stupid to claim that the Gospel of Christ is not the Gospel of the kingdom.

However, there are two possible meanings of ‘the preaching of the Gospel of Christ’:

The first sense has to do with spreading the knowledge about Christ, and in this sense, as Chrysostom points out, the Gospel was preached in the whole world even during the time of the apostles. Accordingly, what is then added, viz., “... and then the consummation will come,” should be understood to be speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem, about which He was speaking literally at that time.

In the second possible sense it means the preaching of the Gospel in the whole world with its full effect, with the result that the Church is firmly fixed (*fundetur*) in every nation. And as Augustine points out in his letter to Hesychius, in this sense the Gospel has not yet been preached in the whole world; but once this is done, the consummation of the world will come.