



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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Lesson 6

Romans 3:21-31 Commentary

New International Version

(Romans 3:21) But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Because God created people in His image and made them capable of revealing His glory and holiness, God revealed the moral standards (the Law) that guided God, and that God wanted to guide the moral behavior of all people. Throughout eternity, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the holy angels have thought, behaved, and maintained relationships according to the Law of God, which is the Law of Love. The Bible and the actions and words of Jesus summarize the Law of Love as love for God, others, and oneself, as a concern for the happiness and well-being of all people as revealed by God in the Bible and as further defined or summarized by the Ten Commandments. The Law of God in the Bible reveals the Law of Love or the righteousness of God, but the Law and the Prophets testify to a better revelation of the righteousness of God, and that revelation came through Jesus Christ when He came into the world and lived and taught among us, and when He died and rose again to make our forgiveness by God justly possible. Jesus Christ

revealed God's righteousness fully and Jesus restores to righteousness all who will believe in Him, a righteousness that cannot be obtained apart from faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, a righteousness that leads us to love God.

(Romans 3:22) This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, perfectly revealed love for God, others, and himself. By His sacrificial death, resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven, He honored God and God's Law, and bestows righteousness (a rightness, a right place, and a right relationship in the family of the true God) to all who will put their faith in Him. His offer is made to all Jews and Gentiles; neither Jews nor Gentiles are better than the other.

(Romans 3:23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

In Romans 1-3, Paul proved that the Gentiles (the ones without the Bible or the Law of God written) were accountable to God, had sinned against God, and deserved God's just punishment in this present time and on the Day of Judgment. Paul also proved that the Jews (the ones with the Bible, which included the Law of God written) were accountable to God, had sinned against God, and deserved God's just punishment (they were not privileged above

others just because they possessed the Hebrew Scriptures—God would not give them a special pass to disobey Him with impunity because they were Jews and not Gentiles). Moreover, the Jews had failed in their God-given responsibilities to serve as a kingdom of priests for God, to teach the nations about the true God, to explain His Law of Love to them, and to demonstrate the love of God by the way they taught and treated others. Based on the understanding that God made people in God’s image to honor God by obeying God and living according to the Law of Love in all relationships and ways that would glorify God and reveal His character, everyone has sinned and failed to glorify God.

(Romans 3:24) and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Having failed God, others, and themselves by violating the Law of Love, everyone deserves to be separated forever from God and those who love God. On the Day of Judgement, based on their works, everyone deserves the just sentence of God, a guilty verdict, and God’s just punishment. But God demonstrated His true love for everyone by sending His only begotten Son, Jesus, into the world to save (from what they deserve) those who believe in Him. God gave (and gives) sinners grace, love, mercy, and pardon freely (without compulsion, without being “earned” by the sinner’s works) when He sent Jesus into the world to redeem believers in Him (to free believers

from slavery to death, sin, and Satan). Similarly, as a poor illustration only, one might redeem a slave by paying his owner the asking price to free him or her from slavery. The value God places on each person and in upholding His law (the importance of obeying the Law of Love) is reflected in the price He paid to justly forgive and restore sinners to a right relationship with God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), which was the death of His one and only Son, Jesus Christ. He freed the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt with His mighty hand, and He frees believers from sin and slavery to Satan through the death and resurrection of His Son. Because God loves everyone, He graciously and freely sent His Son to die as a sacrifice for our sins and to free believers in Jesus from the eternal consequences of their sins.

(Romans 3:25) God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—

For sinners to receive forgiveness, pardon for sins, and redemption, they must receive Jesus and His sacrifice in their behalf by faith. By God's grace, Jesus died a sacrificial death on the cross as a substitute for the death sinners deserve. According to the Law of God, and to uphold the honor of God, His Kingdom, and the value of the Law of Love, all sinners deserve God's punishment, but

because God loves Jews and Gentiles alike, God the Father and the Son chose to suffer the punishment sinners deserve by sending Jesus into the world to die in our place. On the Day of Atonement, the priests went to the tabernacle (or later, the temple) and presented sacrifices to God to “atone” for the sins that the Jews had committed during the previous year. God accepted these sacrifices (that He had commanded the priests to offer) to make the Jews “at one” with Him again. After the sacrifice of atonement, God graciously gave the Jews a new beginning for another year. This part of the Law of God pointed to the future coming of Jesus Christ, who shed His blood in a once and for all sacrifice of atonement to make both Jews and Gentiles “at one” (atone) with God if they believed in Jesus as the Messiah and received Him and His sacrificial work in their behalf by faith. In the past, God did not (and still does not) give a visible demonstration of His just punishment each time a sinner broke (or breaks) His Law. God withheld (and still withholds from us) deserved punishments, and God waited patiently (and still waits patiently for us to repent) until with perfect timing He sent Jesus into the world to demonstrate His justice, His righteousness, and His high regard for His Law (that He expected and expects everyone to obey).

(Romans 3:26) he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Jesus died and rose again “at the present time” during Paul’s lifetime and the lifetime of many of his readers. The Law of Love influenced Jesus to die in behalf of sinners so God would be able to justly and mercifully forgive them and save them from punishment, to demonstrate the righteous regard that God has for Himself, His law, His Kingdom and sinners. Forgiveness by the King of the universe, who must justly uphold His Kingdom, could not come cheaply or with a disregard for love, justice, and mercy toward all. God will be just and righteous toward those who place their faith in Jesus: God declares believers in Jesus justified and in a right relationship with Him now and will declare them justified and right with Him again on the coming Day of Judgment.

(Romans 3:27) Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith.

No one can boast that they are better than anyone else in the eyes of God, for all have sinned. No one can boast that they are justified or right with God because they have obeyed or for the present are obeying or intend to obey someday the Law of God. To be justified or saved, God requires faith in Jesus and what Jesus did for sinners. Because people are saved by faith in Jesus Christ and not by “doing something to earn favor with God,” the followers of Jesus should never boast about their relationship with God through Jesus. Believers are saved by grace and Jesus’

faithfulness to fulfil the task that the Father and He set for Him to do on the earth, so there is no place for boasting by forgiven sinners.

(Romans 3:28) For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

No one can be justified, be made right with God, be cleansed from sin, be freed from the power of sin, and be filled with the Holy Spirit by simply trying to do what the Law of God requires, for the Law of God shows people that they are sinners and need the saving work of Jesus Christ. To be justified, repentant sinners must receive the Person and work of Jesus Christ by faith. According to God's plan and because Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, only Jesus can deliver sinners from the just punishment they deserve; furthermore, Paul always emphasized that repentant sinners must place their faith in Jesus for salvation.

(Romans 3:29) Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too,

If God justified people by works of the Law instead of by faith in Jesus, then Gentiles would need to become Jews, be circumcised, and obey the Old Testament to be saved. But God is the God of the Gentiles too, and God has decreed that Jews and Gentiles must be saved by faith in His Son and not by works of the Law.

(Romans 3:30) since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

Since there is only one God in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and since each Person is involved in the lives of believers in Jesus for their salvation, there is only one way of salvation. No religious system can do for anyone what the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit can and will do for repentant sinners who turn to Jesus for justification and sanctification. The One God has decreed one Way of salvation. If God could have justly forgiven sinners in any other way, He would never have sent His Son to die a sacrificial and painful death on a cross. “By faith” and “through faith” may be two ways of saying the same thing. Or, “by faith” in Jesus Christ may indicate that true faith in Jesus Christ begins with a commitment to entrust one’s life and future to Jesus. While “through faith” in Jesus Christ may indicate that the believer is committed to following Jesus in their daily life.

(Romans 3:31) Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

The Law of God revealed in the Old and New Testaments and especially in the obedient example and faithful words of Jesus is the Law of Love that Jesus summarized as love for God and neighbor (and even enemies). God will never nullify the Law of Love. God will never declare that love for God and others no longer applies or is unimportant. Jesus’

death demonstrated the crucial importance of the Law of Love, which the Bible carefully explains and applies in various situations for the benefit of believers and to avoid misconceptions. Jesus' death for sinners offers forgiveness to all, and His resurrection from the dead makes a new life possible when repentant sinners place their faith in Him. His indwelling presence and loving power in the life of every believer in Him guides them in the right application of God's Law of Love in every situation. Just as Jesus demonstrated and did, believers in Him uphold the Law of God while refusing to make obeying the Law of God the basis for being made right with God or righteous.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What are some of the ways God reveals His righteousness?
2. What is another way to refer to or define the Law of God or the moral law?
3. In addition to revealing His Law in the Bible, why did God need to send Jesus Christ into the world?
4. Why do you think God either needed to punish sinners or send Jesus, His Son, to die in order to forgive sinners?
5. How important is faith in Jesus?

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