

Romans 3:31

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/rom/rom-3/romans-331/>

Paul points out that the law is actually upheld when we are justified by faith. When we pursue righteousness by faith, we uphold the law.

Paul asks a question that echoes the slander of the competing Jewish “authorities,” who claim Paul is teaching that we ought to sin. It seems probable that Paul is also writing to defend the teachings of his former ministry companions and fellow Jews, Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18). Priscilla and Aquila are now leaders in the (primarily Gentile) Roman church, even hosting a church in their home (Romans 16:3-5), and are doubtless teaching the same gospel of faith alone as they did alongside Paul.

The competing Jewish “authorities” argue that Paul’s teaching leads to the conclusion that by sinning we show God’s grace, therefore the more we sin the better God looks (Romans 3:8). The competing “authorities” claim Paul is throwing the Jewish law overboard and replacing it with a license to sin. But Paul vigorously denies their charge, saying: *Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law* (v 31).

Paul emphatically insists that faith does not *nullify the Law*, rather *faith* does the opposite. By asserting salvation by grace *through faith*, Paul says *we establish the Law*.

Rather than throwing the law overboard, faith actually *upholds the law*. It is the slandering Jewish “authorities” who are trampling the law by asserting they are keeping the law while they are actually breaking it (Romans 2:1). In doing this, they bring shame to the name of God in their bad witness to the Gentiles (Romans 2:17–24).

Note all the ironies that have been offered in just the first three chapters of Romans. The slandering, competing Jewish “authorities” claim to keep the law and teach others but actually break it and slander God. These “authorities” are going to great lengths to counter Paul’s teaching so they can uphold the law of Moses, but in doing so are setting it aside. The slanderers claim Paul is teaching that since justification before God is a free gift, we ought to sin all the more so God will be shown all the more gracious. But Paul is teaching that the resurrection power of Jesus can free us from sin and death in our daily living.

Paul is demonstrating that the way to uphold the law is to be justified apart from the law, then live a life of faith that God’s way is for our best. Because of the justification we freely receive, we now have the resurrection power of Jesus to overcome sin in our daily lives (Romans 1:16-17). We should not be surprised at all this irony, since Jesus’s teaching is full of paradox. For example, Jesus taught that we should die that we may live, we obey so we can be free, and we serve as the least so we can be first and greatest (Matthew 16:24-27, 20:16; 23:11).

Paul places a great deal of importance on this point, that justification before God comes by grace apart from the law, and righteousness comes from living by faith. When this was disputed, Paul dropped what he was doing in Antioch and traveled to Jerusalem, assembling the apostles and elders of the church of Jerusalem to settle the question (in Acts 15).

We are still reading and studying the extensive letter he wrote to the church at Rome, the center of the world at that time, to address the question “What is righteousness, and how is it obtained?” Paul adamantly defends the position that righteousness before God is received as a free gift through faith in Jesus, then the experience and benefits of righteousness are gained through living a life of faith, believing that God’s ways are for our best, through the resurrection power of Jesus (Romans 1:16-17).

It is the nature of man to gravitate toward rules. We all tend to use them to justify ourselves and attempt to control others. Paul stands on the reality that no number of laws can change a human heart, which is the core need of mankind that Jesus came to resolve. Jesus took on the sins of the world, that all might have the opportunity to be redeemed; they need only to believe and receive the gift by faith (John 3:14-15; Romans 4:1-3).

Biblical Text

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