



# Finer Grounds Bible Study

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## Romans

### Lesson 6: Romans 3:19-31

Have you ever noticed that our nature as human beings is very, “this or that?” For example, for many years I believed people were either healthy or enjoyed good food. It took me a long time to understand that it really is possible to both be healthy and enjoy good food. As people graduate, we typically ask, “Are you going to go to college, or will you get a job?” I know for our family the answer to this question is a resounding, “yes!” Our daughter is diligently working her way through college in order to hopefully graduate debt free. As women I think we also often feel that we can either be attractive or modest, and we fail to realize that with a little effort we can be both. I think this is sometimes why we struggle with relationships; we want to put everyone and everything into a lovely box with a bow on it. The idea of something or someone being this and that never seems to enter our mind.

I also think this is one of the biggest reasons we struggle to understand God and His word: He doesn't fit into one of our little boxes. We don't like to try to reconcile the fact that God is both loving and wrathful (1 John 4:8, Nahum 1:2). We don't like to reconcile the fact that it is both our hearts and our actions that we will be held accountable for on the day of judgment. God is not a God of “this or that” except in the broadest sense: we either choose to live in

obedience to Him or we don't. In most other facets He is a God of this and that. If we want to be faithful to Him, we must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). We must repent and be baptized to be forgiven of our sins (Acts 2:38). We must love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5).

This struggle is exactly what Paul is addressing in today's text. For the Jews, the law was either all that mattered, or it didn't matter at all. In Romans 3:19-31 we find the word “faith” used eight times, and the word “law” 12 times. Paul is trying to help the Jews understand that it's not faith or law, it's faith and law because both have had a vital role in reconciling man to God.

**Read Romans 3:19-31 and look for any key words or phrases.**

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It is important to note that throughout this text the word “law” will be used by Paul in multiple ways: #1 as the Torah, which was basically the Jewish law of government and teachings that were based upon the law of Moses but had become a works of merit system of justification, #2 the whole of the Old Testament, and #3 God's overall laws for



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His people, whether the law of conscience or laws found in Scripture. I will be using context and the Logos Greek exegetical guide to determine how it's being used in specific passages.

### Read Romans 3:19-20

With verse 19 alone Paul uses "law" in 2 different ways: "whatever the law says" is referring to the Hebrew Scriptures. However, "those who are under the law" refers to any law of God. Through the Holy Spirit Paul is pointing out that all men, both Jew and Gentile, are accountable to God's laws. Even though the Gentiles did not have the law of Moses every mouth would be stopped: no one could argue this point because everyone, everywhere, for all of time has been accountable to God for our actions.

This word "accountable" is very powerful also. It literally means, "subject to legal action." This is the first of several times throughout this text that Paul will use legal terminology. His point is simple: all mankind is subject to legal action by the Almighty God, because we have all been given His laws for us.

In verse 20 both usages of the word "law" refer to the general law of God. Paul's point is that because of the very nature of what a law is and does it cannot justify, it can only convict. When we are driving, we do not get rewarded for obeying traffic laws, however we can certainly be convicted if we violate one. God's law for the Jews, the Law of Moses, was never intended to be viewed by them as

a means of justification. The purpose of the law was to give God's people a knowledge of their sin, to show them their (and our) need for redemption.

Verse 20 is also, in some ways, a precursor for Romans 3:23. The word for "knowledge" here is the Greek word *epignōsis*, which means an experiential knowledge. Through God's laws for mankind we all have a personal, experiential knowledge of sin. We have all messed up, and we all know we have messed up.

**Do we measure our sin, and our knowledge of sin, by God's laws or by the world's?**

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### Read Romans 3:21-26

This is a longer section than we normally study at one time, however in the Greek this is all one long sentence. The only time we see the word "law" in this section is in verse 21, and both usages are going to refer to the Old Testament Scriptures. In this text Paul is reminding us of the main point of everything: it isn't "this or that," it isn't "Jew or Gentile," the point of everything is the ultimate righteousness of God. The old law served as a witness to the righteousness of God.

As we move on in this text there are two little big words in verse 22. Remember that little big words are words that it is easy to skip over, but that carry a huge meaning for



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the text. First of all, he states, “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ...” This righteousness is specifically through faith in Jesus Christ. While it is available to all men, both Jews and Greeks, it is only accessed through our faith in Jesus Christ. It is also, “for all who believe.” Just as the Law of Moses was for a specific group of people, God’s righteousness is also for a specific group of people: those who believe.

People frequently bicker and argue about faith verses believe, and although we have given these words different meanings in the English language, in the Greek they are actually the same word. To believe is to have faith, and to have faith is to believe. It’s also interesting to note that this is the same word found in the Faith Hall of Fame: Hebrews 11. In Hebrews 11 we find the phrase, “by faith,” 18 times, and every single time it is tied to an action: by faith Abraham obeyed, by faith Abraham went, by faith Moses was hidden, by faith the people crossed the Red Sea, etc. What does this mean for us? That if we claim we believe, if we claim we have faith, but the actions of our lives and our hearts don’t show that faith and believe, then we are only deceiving ourselves.

**Do we use the words faith and belief the same way that Scripture does?**

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**How is our faith currently being shown to those around us by our actions? How can we improve in this area?**

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Moving on to verses 23-24 we see that this righteousness is made available to all without distinction because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. This righteousness is a gift, and this gift has been redeemed through Jesus Christ. This word “redeemed” is a slave term which refers to a slave’s freedom having been purchased. Christ, through his blood and by the grace of God, has redeemed us from a life of slavery to sin.

Verse 25 tells us that the blood of Christ is our propitiation. “Propitiation” is a nice, big, churchy word that is in all actuality completely awe-inspiring. It literally refers back to the mercy seat of God on the ark of the covenant. The blood of Christ is where we gain access to the mercy seat of God! If we know our Old Testament, God has given us his entire plan of salvation in this one little word!

In Leviticus 16 we read about the Day of Atonement. This was the day in which the High Priest would offer specific sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people. After the sacrifice was made, the High Priest would sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat and on the altar. Jesus, as our propitiation and High Priest, has already spread his blood on the



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altar and the mercy seat for us. While this covers the High Priest's part, we also must accept the covenant God has made with us. In Exodus 24:6-8 we see Moses demonstrating Israel's acceptance by putting the sacrificial blood directly on the people. We must also come into direct contact with the blood of Christ before we are righteous before God. The only biblical method we are given to contact the blood of Christ is through the act of baptism, which we will see more in-depth in chapter six.

Continuing on in this text, although the blood of bulls and goats was never able to offer forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 10:4), the Israelite's obedience to the law and the sacrificial system allowed God to pass over the former sins until full atonement was made by Jesus Christ. The wording in verse 26 is beautiful, "so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." God is not only just Himself, his desire is to also justify us. This word "justify" gives me goosebumps. In spite of my flaws, my sins, my inevitable daily shortcomings, by the blood of Christ in God's eyes it is "just as if I had never sinned."

**How does this understanding of propitiation impact your view of what Jesus did on the cross?**

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**How does the biblical understanding of justification impact the way you view yourself?**

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**Hebrews 2:17, 1 John 2:2, and 1 John 4:10 are all verses about Jesus being the propitiation for our sin. Study these verses in comparison with Romans 3:25.**

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**Read Romans 3:27-31**

Once again, in this passage we see the word "law" used in various ways. Both usages in verse 27 refer to law or rule in general, however throughout the rest of this passage "law" is specifically referring to God's laws. In verse 27 Paul is telling the Jews that any boasting we may do because of our works, our self-proclaimed holiness, is excluded (literally shut out) in the eyes of God. I believe the general form of "law" is used here because it doesn't matter what law we are boasting in; whether it be a law of works, the laws of the land, or even the law of Moses, if we are boasting in ourselves and our own "goodness" then we are nothing.

Verses 28-30 take us back to everything Paul has said up until this point: Jews and Gentiles are all the same in God's eyes. It is our faith, our obedience to God, that allows us to be justified rather than specific adherence to a law. The law of Moses was



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always intended to just be for the Jews, which means that keeping the law must not be required for salvation because God is the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles. God wants all of us to be with Him eternally, and I am so thankful!

Paul makes this comparison even more clear when he states, “who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.” Paul’s basically saying, “tom-A-to,” “tom-a-to.” Call it whatever you will, justification has always been through faith, even while the law of Moses was in effect (Hab. 2:4). Isaiah 29:13 and Matthew 15:8 are both examples of how God has always required faithful obedience from the heart of his people.

And finally, in verse 31, Paul brings it all together for us. It has never been “this or that.” It has never been “faith or law.” God expects both faith and law of His people. Not a merits/works based adherence to the law to earn our way to Heaven, but a heart-deep obedience to God’s will. As Christians we are to uphold God’s law because of the fact that He is just, and He is righteous. Because Christ is our propitiation, we will live out our faith by being obedient to God. Jesus Himself said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” John 14:15. Whether under the old law or the new faithfulness has never been about ticking off boxes, but rather it is about striving every day, in every way, to become more like our Creator from the inside out.

**Are we guilty of focusing on some aspects of Christianity more than others, much like the Jews of Jesus’ day?**

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**When we approach the lost with the Gospel, what is our mindset? Are we striving to “prove them wrong” as the Jews were, or do we approach them as one who has been justified and wants to share the one who made propitiation for us with those around us?**

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**Have you been living a “this or that” faith? If so, what changes can you make to adjust your mindset and your life?**

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