

WHAT DOES ROMANS 3:31 MEAN?

In the opening of his "gospel", the Epistle to the Romans (2:16), Paul reasons that all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike, stands condemned in the sight of God.

"Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin . . . All have sinned." (3:9, 23, NIV)

There is only one solution to the problem:

"Righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe . . . God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith." (Romans 3:22, 30)

Immediately upon describing the solution to the sin problem, Paul poses: "Do we, then nullify the law by this faith?" (3: 31)

To which he immediately answers: "Not at all! Rather we uphold the law."

TWO KEY EXPRESSIONS IN ROMANS 3:31

The two significant expressions in Romans 3:31 are: "this faith" and "the law".

(a) **This Faith**: As the context shows, by "this faith" Paul is referring to that faith in Jesus Christ which God reckons unto righteousness. For example: "(God) justifies the man who has faith in Jesus . . . A man is justified by faith." (3:26, 28. See also verses 22, 25, 30)

(b) **The Law**: The expressions "the law" and "law" cover a range of applications. In some instances "the Law" may refer to the whole of the (Hebrew) Scriptures (our OT). Sometimes reference may be to a part of those Scriptures. It might be a reference to the Pentateuch – the writings of Moses (such as at Matthew 5:17; 12:5, etc.). At other times, the expression "the Law" may be a reference to another section of the Hebrew Scriptures. For example at John 10:34 the expression "your law" is in reference to a passage in Psalms, a section of the OT elsewhere referred to as "the writings", as in Jesus' comments at Luke 24:44.

When Paul uses the term "law" without the definite article ("the"), he is using it in a qualitative sense, with meanings such as: "works of obedience" or "function of the law". (See Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, article: "Law" and the book "Problems in Bible Translation, Review and Herald Publishing, pages 51 – 52)

The two meanings of "law" appear at Romans 3:21. In the first instance, "law" means "works of obedience"; in the second appearance "the law" means a whole section of the Hebrew Scriptures, perhaps all of it:

"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law (*works of faith*), has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets (*our OT*) testify."

This helps the understanding of verse 31, which is the verse being considered.

	3:21	3:31
Righteousness by faith	A righteousness from God, apart from law	
Law	To which the Law and the Prophets testify.	Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? We uphold the law.

WHAT PAUL IS SAYING AT ROMANS 3:31

Not only does verses 21 show that the scope of "the Law" in verse 31 is the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures, but the passage following verse 31 supports this contention.

In this passage (chapter 4), Paul draws on the experiences and utterances of Abraham and of David.

Referring to the 'legal' portion of the Scriptures, Paul shows that Abraham obtained righteousness through faith (4:1-5; 4:13-25). In the midst of his dissertation, Paul calls on the "Writings" portion of the Scriptures, citing David's assertion that "God credits righteousness apart from works." (4:6)

SUMMARY

In citing these examples, therefore, Paul is demonstrating that this teaching of "righteousness by faith" ("this faith") does not nullify the Hebrew Scriptures ("the Law"), but rather upholds it.

Thus, when in verse 31, Paul states:

"Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law",

he is answering the question: "Does Righteousness by Faith annul the Hebrew Scriptures?" He answers by showing that this Righteousness by Faith is a fundamental belief of the key Fathers of the Hebrew faith, Abraham and David.

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