

THE MOST IMPORTANT PASSAGE IN THE BIBLE

Discover God's Grace Study Series

Study #1 - Read Romans 3:19-22

Over the centuries numerous theologians and Bible scholars have come to the conclusion that Romans 3:19-4:8 is the greatest and most important passage in the entire Bible. If their conclusion is correct, and if the Bible is truly *God's Word*, then these verses constitute the greatest and most important words ever written anywhere! In this section of Romans, the Apostle Paul deals specifically and comprehensively with the great issue of personal salvation and justification by grace through faith alone. He explains, in the clearest possible terms, how a person can receive forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and a permanent unchanging righteous standing in God's sight. In spite of the significance of this passage and the magnitude of the truths it contains, most people (including most Christians) have only a surface understanding of its meaning at best.

A. The Purpose of God's Law (vs.19-20)

What Most People Don't Know About The 10 Commandments

The apostle Paul, the author of the book of Romans, begins this section by explaining God's purpose for giving the law of Moses and the 10 Commandments to Israel.

(vs.19) **"The law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God."** - NLT

Q1. According to verse 19, what is the purpose of God's law?

Q2. How do you think the 10 commandments prove/demonstrate that the entire world (i.e., all humanity) is guilty before God?

Let's illustrate what Paul is saying by using the analogy of a courtroom trial. In our scenario the case is being tried, not in an earthly courtroom, but in the Supreme Court of the Universe where God is the judge and you and I are the defendants. The charge that is being brought against us is that we have violated God's law by breaking His clearly stated commands. The judge has concluded that based on the 10 commandments (etc.), the evidence against us is overwhelming and irrefutable. All arguments in our defense are overruled and thrown out as irrelevant. It is clear that we have willfully and frequently broken the law of God. The verdict is in and we are pronounced "guilty" on all counts, without appeal.

(vs.20) **"No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands, the law simply reveals how sinful we are."** - NLT

Most people who read this verse for the first time are surprised at what it says. The reason for this is that many of us, especially if we have been influenced by Judaism, Catholicism or modernistic Protestantism, have been led to believe that we are made right with God by keeping the 10 commandments or by living a moral life (etc.). Yet, notice that what Paul asserts is the very opposite, "No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands".

NLT = New Living Translation, NIV = New International Version, ESV = English Standard Version

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Q3. As you were growing up, what were you taught by parents or others (religious leaders, etc.) about the way a person gets right with God?

Q4. In verse 19, Paul explained that the purpose of God's commandments is to "keep people from having excuses and to show that the entire world is guilty before God." What else does Paul say about the the purpose of the law at the end of verse 20?

The point that Paul is making is that the law and the commandments can never make us righteous, they only show us how *unrighteous* we really are. God uses His law to reveal our sinfulness, to demonstrate our complete inability to save ourselves, and to make us aware of our desperate need for a savior (Jesus). In Galatians he says...

(Galatians 2:16) **"[We] know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified."**(ESV)

Three times in the verse above Paul says that we are not made right with God by obeying the law and three times he says we are made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. God's means of declaring a person to be righteous in His sight is through faith (simple childlike trust) in Christ alone. This is *God's way* of salvation.

B. God's Way of Salvation (vs.21-22)

Perfect Righteousness Through Faith in Christ Alone

Having said that "no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands", Paul now explains how a sinner (anyone who has ever disobeyed God by word, thought or deed) can be completely forgiven and declared perfectly and permanently righteous in His sight.

(vs.21) **"But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago."** - NLT

Notice the two points Paul is making in this verse...

1. God's way of making us right with Him is "without keeping the requirements of the law", i.e., we are not made righteous in God's sight by obeying the 10 commandments or by our efforts to do what the law requires. See Galatians 3:10-14 & 3:23-26.
2. God's way of making us right with Him was promised ahead of time by Moses and the Old Testament prophets. Over and over, these writers pointed to the coming salvation that would be provided through the sacrifice of the Messiah (i.e., Isaiah 53:4-12, etc.). Jesus emphasized this fact when he took His disciples through the Old Testament and explained all the passages and prophecies that referred to Himself. See Luke 24:25-27.

(vs.22) **"We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are."** - NLT

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Q5. According to verse 22, how is a person made right with God?

“Our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God’s free grace. Those who put their faith alone in Christ for salvation are children of God and heirs of eternal life.”

- David Chadwick (Sr. Pastor, Forest Hill Church, Charlotte, NC)

This simple and straightforward message has been all but lost in our day as more and more churches and teachers are placing an emphasis on *what we must do* in order to be saved, instead of on *what Christ has already done for us* on the cross.

“In some churches, it is implicitly or explicitly taught that you are saved through your ‘surrender’ to Christ, plus right beliefs and behavior. This is a fairly typical mistake in evangelical churches. People are challenged to ‘give your life to Jesus’ and/or to ‘ask Him into your life.’ ...People think that we are saved by strong belief and trust in and love for God, along with a life committed to Him. Therefore, they feel they must begin by generating a high degree of spiritual sorrow, hunger, and love in order to get Christ’s presence... But the gospel says that we are saved through our faith. The first approach really makes our performance the savior, and the second makes Christ’s performance the Savior... The message of the gospel is that you are saved by grace through Christ’s work and nothing else at all. As soon as you add anything to it, you have lost it entirely. The moment that you revise it, you reverse it.” - Tim Keller (Author of “Romans for You”)

Sometimes we use words like ‘commitment’, ‘dedication’ or ‘obedience’ as if they were synonyms for faith or conditions for receiving salvation. But this is a misrepresentation and distortion of the correct biblical meaning of faith, as well as a compromise of the true gospel of grace. As Keller puts it, “The message of the gospel is that you are saved by grace through Christ’s work and nothing else at all. As soon as you add anything to it, you have lost it entirely”!

Note: In the Gospel of John the word “believe” is used over 90 times and is the only condition set forth for receiving eternal life! The Greek word translated “faith” and “believe” in these passages means *to be persuaded of, to believe, to have faith in*. The good news of the gospel is that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ and what he has done for them on the cross has eternal life! See John 3:16-19, John 5:24, John 6:35&40, John 8:24, John 11:25-26.

(Ephesians 2:4-9) ***“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ —by grace you have been saved... so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”***

God, in His grace, offers us forgiveness of sins and eternal life as a free gift to be received by faith only. This gift is completely undeserved by us and can never be earned or merited by our deeds, devotion, rule-keeping, or obedience to God’s law.

As we conclude this study, take a moment and read Romans 3:19-22 again.

Optional: For further insight see Acts 10:43, Acts 13:38-39, Romans 1:16-17, Romans 4:1-8, Romans 4:23-26, Romans 5:1-2, Romans 10:4, Galatians 3:1-14, Philippians 3:9.

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