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## Prayers

### To God

*Pray in thanks for the gracious love of God, which has saved you*

*Pray in thanks for His forgiveness of sins from which you have benefitted*

*Pray in thanks for the eternal purposes of God, which govern Your life whether you know it or not.*

### For Self

*Pray for your enemies. Pray for those who persistently make life difficult for you and for the people you love, whether they are in the family or outside of it. Pray in love for people of other faiths whose strength of belief threatens others, and ask God to bless those who curse you.*

### For others

**We pray for people who are too often ignored, for those who have diseases of the mind, sometimes called ‘mental’ or ‘psychotic’ illnesses. We do not understand how or why Your Creation presents us with such challenges, but give us the grace to accept those with such illnesses in love and compassion. We pray especially for those who find their condition hard if not intolerable, and ask for guidance that as Your people, we might do what is right to care for and bless those who are so afflicted. AMEN**

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## Meditation

What will you say to me next time You speak, Lord Jesus?  
 From time to time You have spoken to me in the past,  
 But what next? What will You say, and how will You say it?  
 Save me from thinking that I know already what You will say.

Clear out my ears, my heart, my mind, and my spirit,  
 Open up my soul to hear You speaking new things, new ways,  
 Whether spoken or read, seen, heard or felt,  
 Come and speak again to me, and surprise me delightfully.

Speak! And may I never limit Your creative Word!  
 Liberate me into Your world with a greater revelation  
 Full of love, prophecy, sustenance, care and guidance,  
 Just waiting to be seen, and heard, and fully grasped ...

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## Bible Passage

## **Romans 3:27-31**

<sup>27</sup> What room is there for pride? It is thrown out! On what principle? That of keeping the Law? No! Rather, on the Law of faith! <sup>28</sup> For we maintain that a person is put right with God by faith, and not by doing what the Law requires. <sup>29</sup> Is He the God of the Jews alone, or is He God of the Gentiles too? Yes, the Gentiles as well, <sup>30</sup> since there is only one God, and He makes the circumcised right with Himself on the grounds of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith.

<sup>31</sup> Do we throw out the Law because of this faith? Absolutely not! On the contrary, we uphold the Law!

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### **Bible study Review**

After the wonderful explanation of faith given in the previous verses (21-26), this passage comes as something of a shock! What is Paul saying here and why? The passage is difficult to read, which is probably because translators have difficulty themselves in understanding exactly what Paul was trying to say here. Elsewhere in his letters, much of Paul's writing is in the form of long sentences (a good example may be found in Ephesians 1), but here, the text is animated, and consists of short, sharp sentences, *'what room is there for pride? It is thrown out! On what principle? That of keeping the Law? No!'* (3:27). People speak like this when they feel strongly about something, so Paul's message here must be something he felt passionate about.

However awkward the passage may seem to us, it is still about the same theme of salvation by faith. Paul's main point is this; the Good News is not divided up, as if God has one message for the Jews and a different message for the Gentiles. He insists that the Gospel message is one, just as God is one (3:30). The news that Paul has just announced (3:21-26) says that people can be made righteous in God's eyes freely, through faith in Christ, and this is equally true for all people, Jew and Gentile. Everything about this passage suggests that Paul was very concerned lest some think there was one law for Jews and another for Gentiles, something which went against everything he taught.

The first words in our passage pick up this concern, as he is clearly speaking about the way his fellow Jews prided themselves on keeping the Law and were, they believed, 'justified' in God's eyes. Paul therefore asks *'what room is there for pride'* (3:27)? he is affronted that anyone, let alone a Jew, should try and justify themselves before God, and he will have nothing to do with this. Such pride must be *'thrown out'* (3:27).

As we read on, however, it is easy to become confused by what comes next, and we will look at this in more depth in the 'going deeper' part of this study. Yet put simply, Paul assumes that his largely Gentile readers accept his general point that everyone stands accused by God's Law. The Law of God may explain moral truth about creation, but it cannot deliver a right relationship with God, and has now been replaced by what Paul now calls the *'Law of faith'* (3:27). You cannot find the extraordinary phrase *'Law of faith'* anywhere else in Scripture, but it captures Paul's point perfectly. The coming of the Gospel does not mean that God's moral Law is thrown out, rather, the human pride of the Jewish people who believe in it is thrown out, and a greater 'Law' of faith supersedes the moral law of condemnation. It is God's work of salvation by faith.

Verses 29 and 30 then develop this idea to advocate the unity of God's people. There is only one God, and where His favour once rested on the Jewish people, it now rests on all who come to Him in faith (3:30). When reading this, we must remember that the word 'faith' means not merely '*faith in God*' as if a religious choice can make the difference. Instead, it means '*faith in Jesus Christ*', which is the human response to the grace of God by which we are saved(3:24). All this is clear from the rest of the chapter, even if Paul does not say it here.

In the very last verse of this passage, Paul turns again to the important matter of the difference between the Gospel of grace and the Old Testament Law of God. Those who read Paul's writing about the Gospel of grace through Jesus Christ might think that the Old Testament Law has now been ditched. However he makes clear, as he does throughout Romans, that this is not the case, saying '*we uphold the Law!*' (3:31). Throughout, Paul is consistent. The Law has a place in God's eternal plan as the means of moral illumination and the revelation of sin. Consistently, his point is that contrary to Jewish expectation, no one can call on the Law before God and claim a place at His table. This can only be done by faith in Jesus Christ, whether for Jew or for Gentile. If we really have not got this point by now, we are well off the beaten track in our study of Romans!

It is not easy to pick your way through these verses, but they give us a flavour of the strong feelings these subjects aroused when Paul first wrote this letter. Yet perhaps people today should be concerned about what Paul says here. The church cannot afford to compromise the principle for which Paul fights, or allow anyone to feel that their good deeds suffice for access to heaven and the eternal things of God; and unfortunately, too many Christians have lived as if this is true even if they do not say it openly. There is only one way to the Father, and this is through faith in Jesus Christ.

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## Going Deeper

### ***A detailed look at verses 27 and 28***

If you read verses 27 and 28 in more than one translation, you will be confused, yet the translation of this passage is important, so I dwell on it here and explain my own. I offer two other translations below alongside my own, for you to compare. The reason for differences in translation is because those who work on the text have different opinions about what Paul's words mean. But even though we are stuck with the results of their efforts, anyone can compare the translations and consider reasonably all the issues at stake; even if we cannot resolve them for ourselves we can at least get to understand the issues better.

*Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. (NIV)*

*Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. (NRSV)*

*What room is there for pride? It is thrown out! On what principle? That of keeping the Law? No! Rather, on the Law of faith! For we maintain that a person is put right with God by faith, and not by doing what the Law requires. (PHA)*

The greatest differences between these three translation appear from the third phrase onwards; contrast, '*on what principle? That of keeping the Law?*' (PHA) with '*by what law? By that of*

works?’ (NRSV). In order to clarify what is being said throughout these verses and why there are different translations, I will number each phrase of my own translation, and briefly describe the issues at stake.

1. *‘What room is there for pride?’* Most of the translators use the term *‘boasting’*, but I prefer *‘pride’*. This is because *‘pride’* is a correct translation of the Greek word, and it implies an inner attitude towards the law not an outward expression of it, such as in the word *‘boasting’*. I reckon this is closer to what Paul is saying here, largely because he is talking about principles rather than deeds.
2. *‘it is thrown out’* There is little debate about this phrase, which is just one brief word in Greek. It is rare for Paul to use one word where several will do!
3. *‘On what principle’* The Greek word here is a general word for law, and can also mean *‘principle’*, *‘conduct’*, or *‘what is proper’*. Paul may have been speaking about the Jewish Law here, but it makes little sense here. More likely, Paul was simply asking about the grounds for dismissing pride, and not saying anything about the Jewish law. This makes the whole sequence of phrases in verse 27 more understandable; his answer is that no one who has been saved by faith can be proud because it is nothing to do with anything he or she has done.
4. *‘that of keeping the law’* In the Greek, this phrase is simple; it says *‘by works’*. But this is a technical word that refers to doing the works of the Law, hence my translation.
5. *‘No! Rather, on the Law of Faith!’* The famous phrase *‘Law of Faith’* is used by Paul to contrast with *‘keeping the Law’*. Yet although this is a powerful expression, Christians do not use it! If we did, we might perhaps gain a better understanding of what Paul means when he contrasts Jewish *‘Law’* with various aspects of the Gospel in his other letters.
6. *‘For we maintain ...’* This verse (3:28) echoes what Paul has said earlier in 3:22-24. This is the heart of Paul’s message and what he seeks to safeguard at all costs.

### ***The unity of God and the unity of His Word***

At the beginning, Paul alludes to the Jewish pride in their possession of the Law, and the relationship with God they believed they had through this. Paul says in verse 27 that such pride and boasting should be *‘thrown out’*, but not the Law itself. In addition, the rest of verse 27 strongly implies, through the rather complicated grammar of the verse, that it is God who has thrown out this pride and boasting, and offered as an alternative the *‘Law of faith’* which cannot be boasted about. This phrase is the result of Paul’s attempt to explain that faith is not so much an alternative to God’s Law, but it is a bigger, broader, and more fundamental understanding of God’s Law. His argument is that this must surely be the case, because God is Lord of all, not merely the God of the Jews. When he says *‘God is one’* (3:30), his argument is that God is God of both Gentiles and Jews, and all people from whatever background or race, all are put right with God on the basis of faith, not merely the keeping of the Law as given to the Jewish people.

When put like this, Paul’s points here are very similar to the words of Jesus. He was equally clear about the place of the Law within God’s revelation: *‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets; I have come to not to abolish but to fulfil’* (Matt 5:17). So Jesus is Himself an example of what we are talking about here in this passage. He holds that there is something deeper and more significant than doing what is right before God, and that unless the heart is right before God then no amount of observance can help. This is what lies behind Jesus’ tough teaching on things like *‘turning the other cheek’* (Matt 5:39), and his prohibition of lust (Matthew 5:28).

In this passage of Romans, Paul tells us that God's intention is to abolish and throw away not the Law itself, but the belief that one can be saved merely by the human effort to try and keep it, just as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. In the context of the whole of Paul's letter, this passage is a short transitional piece between his great explanation of 'justification by faith' (3:21-26), and his more lengthy explanation of how the revelation of the Law through the history of the Jewish people, fits together with faith in Jesus Christ as preached by himself and the church. Those who study Romans often miss out the next chapter of Romans (ch.4); however, Paul's explanation of how 'Law' and 'faith' dovetail together is essential to his whole letter.

### ***The place of the Law***

It is extremely important that we read and take notice of the last verse here (3:31). Paul explains here that the Law is an important part of God's revelation, even though it is not a means of salvation. The Jewish people were wrong to place their trust in it, but this does not mean that it does not have a place in God's plan. At the very least, the Law was important for establishing the people of God when they came out of Egypt, and its laws held people to account throughout the history of Israel. In New Testament times, it has become a means to understand the nature of sin, but as Jesus point out so succinctly in the Sermon on the Mount, it is at times a very limited expression even of God's moral law.

This, of course, is the clue to our use of the Law today. In the Christian church, people frequently suggest that because the Law has been superseded by Christ, it is therefore not worth reading or studying. This is a great mistake. Paul himself knew a great deal about God and Jesus because he had studied the Law throughout his life, even before he became a Christian, and this prepared him for what was to come. In his many letters, he speaks disparagingly about the law at times, but here in Romans, he seems to be aware more than ever before of not being too derogatory about it. At various points in the letter, Paul agonises over the whole question of what God has done to the Jews and whether He has a place for them in His heart despite their rejection of Him (see Romans 9-11). We are wise to accept this passage about the law as being Paul's most measured.

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## **Application**

### ***Discipleship issues***

#### ***One Gospel message***

One way in which we can respond to this text is to make sure we have a right attitude towards God's Law. Another is to properly appreciate the fact that there is only one Gospel message of salvation by faith in Jesus; we forget this too easily. Churches today sometimes relish their differences, even in their beliefs about how people are saved (by faith, through a method of baptism, through 'communion' etc.). Churches commonly have 'mission statements' concocted to tell everyone, including the world about their goals and aims. I have seen some that mention the Gospel, and others that do not!

#### ***One Gospel - one mission***

How extraordinary! There is only one Gospel, and there is only one Saviour. Moreover, we only have one Mission, which is to make the Gospel known by all means. So, we must be careful to make sure that when a church publishes its own intensions for mission, this is properly placed within the overarching Mission of God (etc.). God's people must always be careful to preserve the unity of Christ in His Body, and it seems to me that people are far keener on their divisions than their unity today.

### ***Compromising with the world***

Also, in the light of what Paul says here, it is a terrible thing when Christians fall short of their own high calling by appearing before the world to be people who are proud about themselves and what they believe. The exhibition of a proud heart is an abomination to God; for when we set ourselves up in the eyes of others as being better because of our faith then we promote ourselves, and not God, and this is idolatry. The days when Christians argued with Jews about Law and faith are long since gone, but we should remember from this text that Paul's starting point was that the Jews were proud of what they believed, and God was deeply unhappy with this. Perhaps, if past generations of Jews had not been proud of their Godly inheritance, then the message of faith could have been delivered to the world with less anguish and division. Christians today should not respond to this passage by saying 'ah, we got it right and the Jews got it wrong'. Rather, they should accept that the human sin of pride and arrogance can and will disrupt both obedience to God's Law and also faith; we must therefore stand against it.

### ***Ideas for exploring discipleship***

- Think about what you have done, or will do, during the day. How does it all fit into God's will for your life? This may seem a straightforward question, but you may find that in trying to answer it, it becomes less straightforward!
- Pray about pride, and ask the Lord to help remove from you all pride in your work, your witness and your church and private life.

### ***Questions for groups***

1. Discuss in your group what this text says about how law and faith, and how they are connected.
2. Can you give examples of how a Christian might fall into being proud of their faith in a way that does not give glory to God and is therefore idolatrous?
3. What do we mean by saying God is 'Lord of all' in a world of many different faiths?

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## **Final Prayer**

**God of grace and God of mercy; we find it hard to be conscious of Your presence and trust in Your love all our waking hours. Be gracious to us daily we pray, and accept our faith; and by the power of Your Holy Spirit, transform our attempts to do what is right into an acceptable witness to You, who are our Lord and Saviour. Thanks be to God:  
AMEN**