

God's Top 40 devotionals are simple ...

WHAT – What was written, by who and what does it say?

WHY – Why is it important?

WOW – What things should I take notice of? What other scriptures are related?

27. Romans 3:21-31

READ Romans 3:21-31

What – This is one of the most eloquent sections of scripture ever written, and in it Paul reminded the Christians at Rome that their hard work and observance of the Law was not what allowed them to enter into the presence of God. Rather, Paul said, all of us fall short of God, no matter who we are or what we do, so that only faith in Christ, allowing His atoning work to take the place of our efforts, can bring us into the presence of God. Paul concluded this section with a powerful yet often overlooked statement that by faith we do not NULLIFY the Law, but we UPHOLD it. Our works do not save us, but they do show that our faith, the real substance of our salvation, is whole and true and placed in the proper place, upon the Cross of Christ.

Why – This scripture is important because the church has struggled for 2000 years with the simplicity of Jesus' message. Notice I said simple, not easy. The basic tenant of Christianity is the substitution of Jesus for us on that cross. We deserved to die, but God instead died himself in our place. As humans, especially in Western, modern civilization, we struggle with this concept. We believe that we must "earn" whatever we get. We think that we are so good and smart and powerful that we can craft our own salvation. Salvation by our works fits well in our worldview. We get to "achieve" or "earn" our spot next to God in heaven. The problem is that it does not work that way. God is HOLY. No one can hold a candle to Him. For us to go to heaven, we must be perfect! As Paul said here, no one is perfect. All of us sin. That is why Jesus had to be God in the flesh. What human sacrifice could settle the accounts of all humanity? One man could atone for his own sins on a cross, maybe, but only God could atone for the sins of the world. Because of that, the order of operations is crucial here. That is what Paul is really talking about. Good works matter, but as an outflow of faith and not as a substitute for faith. Faith must come first, or the good works, no matter how powerful, fall short because they are not enough to match the cross or connect us to a holy and perfect God.

WOW – There are so many other scriptures that support and coincide with this section of Romans. This is important because the number one rule of Bible interpretation is that we must allow the Bible to interpret itself. If two scriptures appear to contradict each other, one of them is being interpreted improperly, because the Word NEVER contradicts itself. In Matthew 5:21-22 Jesus says that anger is equal to murder and lust is equal to adultery. The point Jesus makes is the same as Paul in this section of Romans (vs 23). NO ONE can live up to God's standards. James also agrees with what Paul wrote here. James said in chapter 2 of his letter that the kind of faith that saves is the kind that we see show up in good works. Paul reminded us here that the entire Bible gives testimony to the fact that faith that saves is faith that comes before, but also leads to, good works. He said that the

Law and the Prophets testify to this very fact. The Old Testament, Paul said, should lead us to the same conclusions as the life of Christ. Man is justified by faith. God is the only supplier of that righteousness. Man cannot achieve God's favor on his own, but only through the work of Jesus. The atonement of Jesus allows us to know God and serve Him. That service gives glory to God and testifies to the fact that our works are useless without Christ. God is calling ALL of creation back to Him, and when we know Him, our actions will show our faith. Paul was concise and eloquent here. In the same way, Jesus' work on the cross was powerful yet simple. Gods plan is perfect yet simple. Our role is simple too, it just isn't easy. Are you ready to let your faith guide your steps? God is waiting.