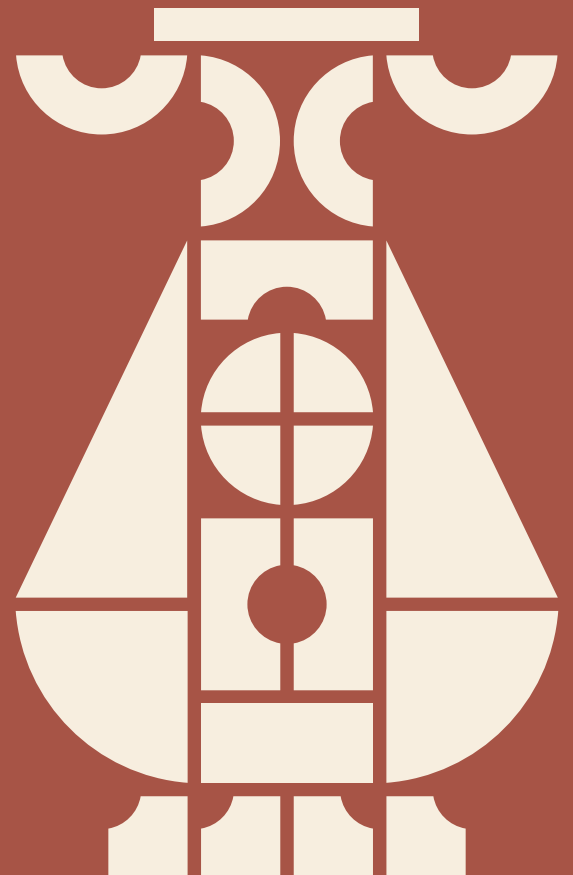


ROMANS

FROM GUILT ————— TO GRACE

LIFE IN CHRIST





Welcome to Life in Christ!

This mini-study is an opportunity to study God's Word in community. Bring this PDF to your group meeting to follow along, or complete the lesson questions beforehand and join the discussion. We pray God will speak to you through His Word.



What is BSF?

Bible Study Fellowship is a global community of 500,000 men, women, students, and kids studying God's Word together. Each year, BSF groups study for 30 weeks, either in person or online.

How does the Bible study work?

This mini-study includes three lessons. Each lesson takes one week to complete.

To get started:

Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day.

Attend a BSF group to discuss your answers or listen to the discussion.

Listen to the weekly teaching on the week's passage (with your group or via the recorded audio lecture).

Read the notes with the passage's historical background and life application.

Repeat for each lesson!

How do I join BSF?

Since a friend has invited you to join their group, simply attend with them. Otherwise, to find a class in your local area, or to join a BSF Online group, go to join.bsfinternational.org.

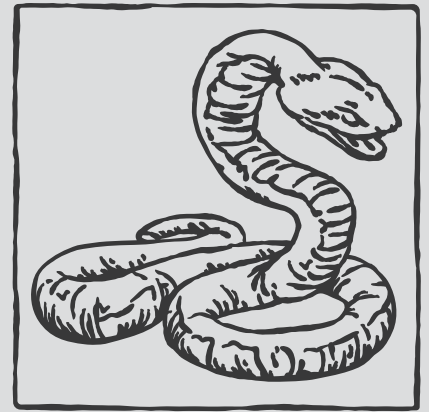
We hope you enjoy using this four-fold approach to exploring God's Word in community with others. Thanks for choosing to study with Bible Study Fellowship!



ROMANS:
From Guilt to Grace

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 3:1-20

LESSON:
4



No One Righteous

Lesson 4 Questions

Since you are starting with Lesson 4, you do not need to answer the First Day questions for this week.

First Day: Read the Lesson 3 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What points from the lecture stirred your thinking about humanity's inexcusable sin before God?
2. How did the notes speak to you in a new way regarding God's judgment of believers and unbelievers?

Second Day: Read Romans 3:1-4.

Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day. You'll discuss these with your group!

Paul responded to objections about God's faithfulness.

3. a. What advantages might Jews have claimed because they were entrusted with God's very words? (See also Romans 2:6-29.)

b. How does God's Word offer spiritual advantages? What other spiritual advantages do believers enjoy?
4. How do God's promises to the Jews help you understand God's faithfulness mentioned in Romans 3:3-4? (See also Genesis 12:1-7; Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Jeremiah 31:35-37; and other verses you know.)

5. a. From Psalm 51:1-6; John 3:18-19; and James 1:13-14, who is responsible for a person's sin and unbelief?
- b. How does this truth impact your view of your own sin, and how can you pray for God's help?

Third Day: Read Romans 3:5-8.

Paul responded to objections about God's justice.

6. a. What "human argument" did Paul expose as wrong?
 - b. Why is God's wrath justified? (See also Romans 1:18-32; 2:1-5.)
7. a. What does Paul's response to this human argument reveal about the people who believe it? (See also Luke 6:46.)
 - b. What human argument do you give for your sin? What does this reveal about your attitude toward sin, and how can you ask for help?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 3:9-18.

Paul described humanity's sinful condition using Old Testament passages.

8. Write down the attributes that immediately follow Paul's use of the term "no one" in verses 10-12. What does this say about the state of humanity?
9. a. What words or phrases in verses 13-14 reveal how seriously God views our speech? (See also Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3.)
- b. What warning do you receive about your own words? (See also James 3:5-10; Matthew 12:34-37.)

c. How would you like God to grow and change the heart motives behind your words and actions?

10. a. According to verse 18, what root sin underlies the sins in verses 13-17?

b. What does it look like to fear (have a reverent awe for) God?

11. a. From these verses, what do you learn about the powerful effects of sin?

b. How have you seen sin's effects in your life?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 3:19-20.

Paul concluded his thoughts on human unrighteousness.

12. What did Paul conclude in verses 19-20?

13. What did Paul mean by "every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God"?

14. a. What excuses for specific sins have you been giving God, and why?

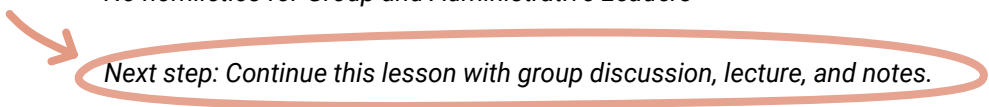
b. How do these verses impact your views on religious rule-following?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 3:1-20.

All people are condemned for their sin and accountable to God.

15. How has the study of Romans so far helped you to identify, confess, and turn from your sin?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders



Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture



After completing the daily questions, listen to this week's lecture. Some groups listen together, but you can also access it online by scanning the QR code.

Lecture Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Lesson 4 Notes

Romans 3:1-20

Dig deeper into this week's passage by reading the lesson notes with the passage's historical background and life application.

Focus Verse

"As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.'" (Romans 3:10-11)

Outline

- Inadequate Defense – Romans 3:1-8
- Inescapable Charges – Romans 3:9-18
- Indisputable Verdict – Romans 3:19-20

Engage

Anger, frustration, and disappointment often accompany failure. No one intends to flaunt their flaws, but human error is impossible to avoid. Some blunders receive grace and encouragement to try again. Other, more serious slipups result in shame and rejection. **How can we protect our sense of self-worth and community value when our failures and flaws are openly exposed?** Various coping strategies promise to ease the bad news of failure. Do you minimize the impact, rationalize the causes, or compare your mistakes with those of others? The world says we can ignore or try to make the best of our failures. But Scripture says something entirely different.

Paul emphatically declares and systematically proves that all people fail to meet God's standard of righteousness. No one can minimize, rationalize, or make the best of their sin against their Creator. God is the only just judge of humanity's ruined condition. **All people are condemned for their sin and accountable to God.** As far as righteousness is concerned, every human is a born a failure. This pride-killing truth makes Paul's gospel of righteousness from God by faith the best news humanity has ever received. Are you ready to accept the best bad news ever?

■ Inadequate Defense – Romans 3:1-8

In Romans 1–2, Paul established that God has made Himself known and that all people sinfully reject Him. Sin's corruption seeped out from the garden of Eden into every man, woman, and child. Sin's guilt plagues every demographic and cultural group. **Without this truth, people fail to recognize that only faith in Jesus Christ guarantees salvation.**

As chapter 3 opens, we read Paul's answers to challenging questions possibly arising from his blunt teaching in chapter 2. Paul continued his letter with a question-and-answer format that would have been common to Jewish and Roman audiences. **Refuting three objections,**

Paul asserted God's faithfulness and humanity's responsibility for unrighteousness. God's righteousness steadfastly remains untarnished by objections and accusations.

The First Objection – 3:1-2

Knowing God does not have favorites,¹ Paul's readers might have asked, "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value then is there in circumcision?" This question casts doubt on the Jews' role in God's redemptive plan. Why did God choose Abraham and his descendants as His people?² Why did God give circumcision as a sign of His covenant?³ Was God's work before Christ pointless?

Rather than dismiss Jewish spiritual advantages, Paul strongly affirmed them. Romans 9:4-5 lists many Jewish advantages: the adoption to sonship, the divine glory, the covenants, the law, the temple worship, the promises, the patriarchs, and the human ancestry of the Messiah. **God generously granted Israel these advantages to help them represent Him to the world and to one day recognize and believe in Jesus.** Tragically, most Jews trusted their spiritual advantages rather than Jesus for salvation from God's judgment. Without faith in Christ, abundant spiritual advantages lead to self-righteousness and unbelief.⁴

"The very words of God" had been entrusted to Jews before being shared with Gentiles. The Greek New Testament word used here for God's written revelation, *logia*, refers to His living, authoritative words, to be received with humility and submission.⁵ God invites all people to know Him through Scripture's divine revelation. The Bible reveals God's unfolding plan to restore His creation through Jesus Christ. Without God's Word, we drift on a sea of human speculation. **To know God's Word is a priceless advantage anyone can access.**

The Second Objection – 3:3-4

Despite God's gifts and promises to His people, most Jews rejected Jesus, the Messiah. **Unbelief led Jewish objectors to doubt God's faithfulness to His people and His promises.** Answering this objection was so important to Paul that he devoted three chapters in Romans⁶ to expand his bold response given in verse 4: "Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar."

God is eternally faithful and true; unbelief is never His fault. **We are each responsible and accountable for our unbelief.** Paul quoted Israel's King David to punctuate his point.⁷ In the same Psalm, David confessed that his sin was not an isolated act but his pattern since birth.⁸ Like David, all people sin because they are born sinful. We even attempt to blame the holy God for our sin when He reveals our unfaithfulness.

Many Jews believed that God's promises to Abraham entitled them to salvation. Today, many from Christian backgrounds also feel entitled to salvation because of believing parents, baptism, or moral lives. Some believe a loving God would never condemn anyone. While familiar, these

1. **No favoritism:** Romans 2:11

2. **Choosing Abraham:** Genesis 12:1-3

3. **Circumcision as sign:** Genesis 17:9-14

4. **Self-righteousness:** Romans 10:3

5. **God's words:** Acts 7:38; Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 4:11

6. **Faithfulness to Israel:** Romans 9–11

7. **God is right:** Psalm 51:4

8. **Born sinful:** Psalm 51:5

beliefs are untrue. **Our faithful God will save all He has promised to save—but not apart from faith in His Son.** Never mechanical, salvation comes by God's grace through personal faith in the one and only Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.⁹ This alone defines true Christianity.

The Third Objection – 3:5-8

Paul continued by addressing the outrageous accusation that the gospel promotes sin to bring God glory. Chapter 6 also addresses this objection. The argument goes like this: "Paul, you teach that good works do not save anyone. You even say God's salvation of sinners brings Him glory. If this is true, why should we not sin even more to bring God more glory?" Paul condemned this reasoning as ridiculous slander. God does not require human evil to highlight His goodness. But humanity's sinfulness does make it clear that God is right to judge the world.

Jesus addressed similar thinking when He asked, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"¹⁰ Paul affirmed God as the supreme, rightful, just judge of His creation. Jesus came to satisfy God's justice and save believers from sin's judgment and control. Jesus did not come to leave people trapped in sin's devastating grip. All whom God saves are joined to Jesus Christ.¹¹ He lives in believers and empowers them to deny their sinful desires, take up their crosses, and follow His example of holiness.¹²

Inescapable Charges – Romans 3:9-18

Paul's methodical argument finally reached its painful conclusion. **All people are sinful, helpless, and ruined.** While Paul's devastating charges are inescapably true, this is not the end of his letter. Many shrink from facing this harsh truth, but these dark realities melt before the brilliant light of God's powerful gospel as Paul intentionally unfolded it.

The Sinfulness of All People – 3:9

Paul's legal-style arguments concluded with a formal charge: "Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin." The weight of conscious and unconscious guilt hangs over all people because of the sins we have committed. **People are held captive under sin's power, which constantly multiplies guilt and torments humanity.** We cannot meet God's righteous standard. On our own, people cannot seek God or understand Him. This ruined state is the definition of our total depravity. Tragically, human depravity makes accepting the reality of our doomed condition challenging.

What Sinners Cannot Do – 3:10-12

Paul outlined humanity's crippling limitations with Old Testament quotes. Like students studying for an exam, we would like to believe we have some power to prepare ourselves before God evaluates us. But we will never make the grade. When we accept our guilt and that we have no hope of pleasing God, we can then receive His undeserved favor—His grace.

9. **Only one Savior:** Acts 4:12

10. **Jesus as Lord:** Luke 6:46

11. **Joined to Christ:** Romans 5:12–6:23

12. **Follow me:** Luke 9:23

The Deathtrap of Sin

The Doctrine of Sin, Its Character and Universality

Every person is equally sinful and subject to sin's powerful spiral of destruction and death.

This biblical truth deals a crushing blow to human pride, signaling helpless defeat under sin's tyranny. Paul delivered this pressing truth to prove that every person needs a Savior more powerful than sin—Jesus Christ. Sin's just penalty brings death and eternal separation from God. Rather than defend ourselves and deny sin's presence in our lives, the gospel invites us to confess, turn from our sin, and seek Christ and His power.¹

All people sin by failing to conform perfectly to God's will. As creator, God alone determines what is right and wrong. Adam and Eve defied God's will in the garden of Eden, releasing death into the earth and guaranteeing that all their descendants inherited their rebellion—a sin nature.² Humanity is not simply sick with sin; sin has rendered all people morally, intellectually, and spiritually dead—unresponsive to God.³

When we argue, rationalize, and deny the seriousness of sin, we remain trapped in sin's deceptive grip. Sin slowly steals joy and peace, separating people from a loving God and the abundant life He offers. **In the realm of unbelief, sin entangles people in an eternal deathtrap of condemnation,⁴ masquerading as temporary freedom and pleasure.** Sin blinds unbelievers to their need for God's grace and mercy. To deny sin's destructive, deceitful character⁵ and presence in every life⁶ is to deny the necessity of Jesus's sacrifice on the cross.

Through the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin,⁷ God brings people to terms with sin's terrible power and consequences. When we accept that sin has corrupted us completely and believe that God sent Jesus to restore us, sin no longer determines our destiny. **Sinless Jesus willingly walked into sin's deathtrap, knowing He alone could walk back out again—triumphant!** Faith in Jesus's death and resurrection produces a powerful new life, no longer helpless before sin's temptations. As the victor over sin, Jesus graciously gives God's righteousness to sinners who seek Him in faith. Have you sought the deliverance from sin that only Jesus can provide? If so, how does Jesus's victory over sin on your behalf stir fresh gratitude today?

1. **Confess sin:** 1 John 1:8-10

2. **Sin inherent:** Romans 1-3

3. **Dead in sin:** Genesis 2:17; 3; Jeremiah 17:9; Ephesians 2:1-2, 12

4. **Sin's penalty:** John 3:36; Romans 1:18-20; 2:5

5. **Sin's deceit:** Hebrews 3:12-13

6. **Sin universal:** Romans 3:10-11

7. **Holy Spirit's conviction:** John 16:7-11

Unable to Be Righteous (3:10, 12) – Sin disintegrates human morality. As the psalmist wrote and Paul quoted, “There is no one who does good, not even one.”¹³ This does not mean people merely miss the mark by a little. The first chapter of Romans banished that illusion. **From God's point of view, we have no righteousness—goodness or right standing—on our own.** Nothing we do could ever make us acceptable to God.

13. **No one:** Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3

If we assess people from a human point of view, some look good or at least better than others. However, human goodness can never compare to God's righteousness. Our righteousness differs from God's righteousness as much as a board game's play money differs from real currency. Just as we cannot spend play money on actual merchandise, our good works can never buy salvation. Despite their spiritual riches, Israel failed to find God because they offered God their play money rather than attain the actual currency only Christ could provide.¹⁴ **God requires true righteousness that is only available through Him.**

Unable to Understand (3:11a) – Sin degenerates the human intellect: "There is no one who understands." From our view, some people appear to understand a great deal. However, Paul refers to a lack of spiritual perception, not just insufficient human knowledge. **From God's point of view, human wisdom is bankrupt; without Christ, no one truly understands or worships God.**¹⁵

Unable to Seek God (3:11b) – Sin demoralizes the human will: "There is no one who seeks God." From our view, attention to religious traditions, places of worship, and sacred relics convince us that people seek God. **From God's point of view, people hide their hearts from His care and guard their minds from His influence, using religion as a disguise.** Apart from God's gracious intervention, people cannot and will not seek Him.¹⁶ God is less desirable to our sinful nature than anyone or anything else. Sin keeps us focused only on ourselves, desensitizing us to others. We do the opposite of the Great Commandment to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.¹⁷

Humanity in Ruins – 3:13-18

Romans 1 clearly describes humanity's grim ruin: "They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents."¹⁸ Ruined people have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, and no mercy. After such a complete catalog of sinful corruption, why does Paul confront readers with more sordid sins in chapter 3? The earlier verses offered the apostle's own descriptions of the human condition. In Romans 3, Paul cited convicting Old Testament quotes to confirm that people have always needed the gospel of grace. **These verses speak of three traits: wicked words, violent acts, and no fear of God.**

Wicked Words (3:13-14) – Paul identified the distasteful sins of gossip, slander, and boasting in Romans 1. As Paul's letter progressed, he quoted provocative psalms to deepen our understanding that offensive speech contains deadly power. **These poetic images vividly associate death with the body parts involved in speaking.** Paul invited his readers to picture throats yawning as open graves and tongues deceiving to destroy.¹⁹ Imagine human lips dripping with poisonous venom and mouths oozing with cursing and bitterness.²⁰ Our words provide listeners a window into our hearts because "the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."²¹ When God crafted humanity in His image,²² He granted us the unique, beautiful, and powerful gift of speech. God intended our words to honor and bless Him and others, but tragically, our words often curse and kill.²³

14. God's righteousness: Romans 10:3

15. Intelligence frustrated: 1 Corinthians 1:18-20

16. Cannot submit: Romans 8:7

17. Love God, others: Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Philippians 2:1-11

18. Ruined humanity: Romans 1:29-31

19. Throats and tongues: Psalm 5:9

20. Poisonous lips and cursing mouths: Psalms 10:7; 140:3

21. Revealing words: Matthew 12:34

22. God's image: Genesis 1:26-27

23. Blessings and cursing: James 3:9-10

Views on Humanity's Will

As we consider Paul's words, a look at some ways Christians have wrestled with what Martin Luther called "the bondage of the will" may help us better understand ourselves and others.

Pelagius and Augustine

About AD 400, the British monk Pelagius said, "If there is an obligation to do something, there must be an ability to do it." Pelagius believed sin does not prevent the human will from choosing God or righteousness. He believed the will is neutral—free to choose either good or evil. Augustine, bishop of the North African city of Hippo, said Pelagius failed to grasp sin's seriousness. Sin, an inherited condition, makes it impossible for people to decide to stop sinning. Augustine described this natural human inability as "not able not to sin." **The will is free of righteousness but enslaved to sin; free to turn from God but not free to come to Him.** Without God's supernatural help, no one stops sinning and chooses God.

Martin Luther and Erasmus

Around 1525, the reformer Martin Luther and the Dutch humanist Erasmus vigorously debated about the human will. Erasmus maintained the will must be free for human beings to be truly free. Luther agreed that people are free to choose lesser things. However, in the crucial area of choosing God, the human will is powerless. Luther stated, "We are wholly given over to sin." **Luther declared we must confess not only our sin but also our blindness and inability to choose God or please Him by our moral acts.** Luther encouraged us all to call on God for mercy, for He alone can help us. Those who call on the Lord will discover His loving conviction and gentle leading to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

Jonathan Edwards

Eighteenth-century American theologian Jonathan Edwards looked at the issue differently. In his text *Freedom of the Will*, he defined the will as "that by which the mind chooses anything." Edwards believed the mind is never neutral but thinks some things are better than other things. **The will always freely chooses what the mind thinks best.** But what does the mind think best? Here lies the heart of the human problem concerning God. The will is free to choose God, but the mind prefers individual autonomy over faith in Christ and God's righteous reign. Therefore, the mind suppresses God's truth and turns from Him.¹ Unless God changes thinking through miraculous spiritual rebirth, all people freely choose miserable alienation from God for eternity.

Jesus lovingly promises, "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away."² This grand invitation strengthened Jonathan Edwards to insist the will is not bound without escape. But who desires to come to the Lord? The answer: no one, unless God is already at work. Depraved minds lack spiritual understanding—blinded to God's truth until the Holy Spirit reveals it. No one has ever stated this more plainly than Jesus, who said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them."³

1. Truth suppressed: Romans 1:19-25, 28

2. Never drive away: John 6:37

3. No one can come: John 6:44

Violent Acts (3:15-17) – Paul’s vivid Old Testament illustrations progressed from evil words to violent actions. He quoted Isaiah’s descriptions of violence that separated people from God’s righteousness, justice, and light.²⁴ The path of people living without God bears three distinguishing markers: bloodshed; ruin and misery; and no knowledge of God’s peace. **People who lack God’s peace through Jesus Christ leave a trail of destruction behind them.**

No Fear of God (3:18) – The last passage Paul quoted explains the root cause behind every wicked act: “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”²⁵ Fallen human nature rejects a reverent awe of God. Self-importance blinds people to both their depravity and God’s glory. **Unable on our own strength to recognize and reject our sin against Holy God, all people must depend on God’s grace and power to redeem.**²⁶

■ Indisputable Verdict – Romans 3:19-20

In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul presents an unshakable case against humanity. Paul brings our thoughts, words, and deeds as witnesses against us. **The verdict is indisputable: We are all unrighteous.** No one can escape guilt for countless wrongs against God. No one can deny accountability to God for their actions. No one deserves God’s declaration of righteousness.

The non-Jew without God’s laws is unrighteous, and the Jew with God’s laws is unrighteous. People suppress the truth God revealed,²⁷ but God writes His requirements on every heart. All have failed to meet the expectations of their consciences and God’s Word.²⁸ All have sinned. All are guilty. All stand silenced before the Judge without excuse.

Until people realize they cannot dispute God’s verdict or meet His righteous standard alone, they cannot escape the wrath their sin deserves. **All people are condemned for their sin and accountable to God.** But there is one path to righteousness that will withstand God’s judgment—faith in Jesus Christ. God provides freedom from conscious and unconscious guilt as His gracious gift to all who cling to Jesus’s redemptive work on the cross as their only justification. God is rich in mercy, compassion, and forgiveness, so He gives a way out.²⁹ This is the glorious subject of the lessons to come.

■ Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul exposed humanity’s sinful condition and corrupted state, inciting objections and accusations against God. Human protests against God’s righteous judgment will crumble. Through God’s gracious gift of His Word, He invites all people to know Him and what pleases Him. Unbelievers cannot adequately rationalize their human doubts about God’s faithfulness and truthfulness. God’s self-existent glory brilliantly shines without the need for contrast with human evil. **God’s sovereign status and righteous character endure eternally untarnished by human sin.**

24. **Violent acts:** Isaiah 59:7-8

25. **No fear:** Psalm 36:1

26. **No recognition:** Psalm 36:2

27. **Truth suppressed:** Romans 1:18-20

28. **Conscience:** Romans 2:15

29. **Our escape:** Ephesians 2:1-10

While God remains perfectly pure and just, believers and unbelievers persist in sinful corruption apart from rescue by God. Sin exercises authoritarian control over our thoughts, desires, will, and actions. Sin infuses human words and works with toxic poison capable of destroying us and everything we love. People are powerless to escape sin's grip and deadly consequences on their own. Paul urged readers to accept this truth and seek God's power to rescue them. **God works through the gospel Paul preached, opening eyes to sin and hearts to Jesus's cleansing righteousness through faith.**

Apply It

The true, righteous, living God reveals Himself—His character and plans—to us in the Bible. These ancient words answer today's most important questions: How did we get here? What is my purpose? Is there a knowable Creator? Do my choices matter? By what standards will I be judged? What happens after I die? **God's Word explains the brokenness we experience in the world and the path to restoration through Jesus Christ.** God's truth in Scripture mercifully reveals sin lurking in our hearts and minds. How do you express value for God's Word? Perhaps you spend money to acquire expensive golden-edged pages, proudly displaying the Bible in your home or collecting as many copies as possible. Owning God's Word does not mean God's Word owns your heart. As we read and humbly allow Scripture's truths to direct our lives, the value of God's Word grows within our hearts. Truth is not relative; truth is transformative. What treasured truth about God's response to your sin can enrich and transform your life today?

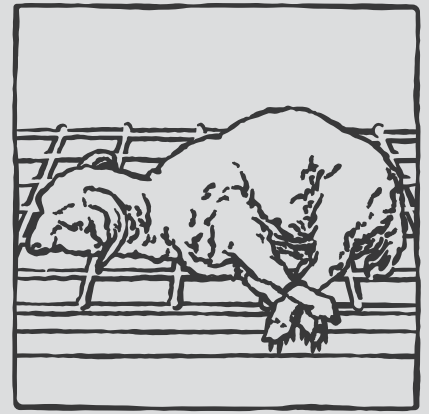
It's obvious—no one is perfect! While many admit imperfection, few admit spiritual depravity. How about you? Depravity does not mean we are as bad as we could be or that we never do good. It means we ultimately lack what is needed to walk with God. In our fallen humanity, we are never good enough to match His character. Why can we more easily admit incomplete biblical knowledge than confess a complete lack of spiritual understanding? Do you find it easier to confess a tendency to wander off the right path rather than admit your path is entirely wrong? What makes it easier to offer excuses that justify sin than to abandon your pride and honestly confess you cannot meet God's standards? In our sinful hearts, we want to be good enough without needing God's perfect righteousness. Personal consciousness of sin's reality and destructive power blasts away the swirling fog that hides our need for Christ. **Jesus did not die to make us better but to make us new.** When we admit our need for Christ's righteousness and receive Him through faith, sin's power to separate us from God is forever broken and restoration begins. Have you confessed your sin and need for Jesus to save you?

Sin's power to rule our lives is broken the moment we place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. If you have confessed faith in Christ, you receive freedom from sin's power and penalty as God's unearned gift of grace to you. However, sinful priorities, speech, and actions linger in a believer's life. Have you noticed how an innate desire to protect and advance yourself competes with glorifying God? How does sin continue to tempt you? Are you aware of how the people, products, and problems around you influence your values and choices? Believers enjoy the growing power to say "No!" to sin and "Yes!" to God's transforming work in their lives. **As believers cry out for God's help to turn from sin, they love as Jesus loves and increasingly want what Jesus wants.** One day, sin will be no more! Until that day, Jesus holds believers secure and invites them to confess their sins and receive His cleansing forgiveness again and again. The joyful gratitude of forgiven believers fuels their worship and witness about the gospel's power to save everyone who believes.

ROMANS:
From Guilt to Grace

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 3:21-26

LESSON:
5



How God Saves Sinners

Lesson 5 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 4 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture impact your understanding of humanity's sinful condition?
2. How did the notes raise your awareness of God's grace toward you, a sinner?

Second Day: Read Romans 3:21-22.

Righteousness from God has been made known.

3.
 - a. Define righteousness. According to these verses, where does righteousness come from, and how is it received?
 - b. What does "apart from the law" reveal about how people are tempted to pursue righteousness?
4. How do the Old Testament law and prophets testify that the righteousness God gives is apart from the law? (See also Genesis 15:6; Jeremiah 31:33-34; Ezekiel 36:23-27; and any other Scriptures.)
5. What does God's willingness to give righteousness to all through faith in Jesus reveal about Him? (See also John 1:12; Romans 10:9-10.) How does this challenge or encourage you?

Third Day: Read Romans 3:23-24.

All people need the salvation God offers by grace through faith.

6. Skim Paul's examples in Romans 3:9-18 of humanity falling short of God's glory. What additional examples can you give to explain this truth?
7.
 - a. Define what it means to be justified.
 - b. How is the justification of sinners accomplished? (See also Isaiah 53:10-11; Luke 18:14; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 2:16; Philippians 3:9; Romans 8:1; or other Scriptures.)
 - c. How does understanding this truth impact how you view your relationship with God?
8.
 - a. How do Hosea 3:1-2; Ephesians 1:7-8; Titus 2:11-14; and 1 Peter 1:18-19 help you understand redemption through Christ Jesus?
 - b. Why is God's grace in justification and redemption good news? With whom would you like to share this news?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 3:25-26.

Jesus's blood atones for humanity's sin.

9.
 - a. Skim Hebrews 10:1-18. What does Paul mean in Romans 3:25 when he says Jesus was a "sacrifice of atonement" (also translated as "propitiation")?
 - b. How does this assure you that God's justice has been satisfied? (See also John 19:30; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.)
10. What does Jesus's role in redemption and atonement reveal about Him?

11. How can you express your gratitude for such great love?

Fifth Day: Reread Romans 3:25-26.

God's justice has been satisfied.

12. How did God treat the sins of those who had faith in Him before Christ's sacrifice of atonement? (See also Genesis 9:5-6; Deuteronomy 28; and any other Scripture references for help.)

13. How does God's saving work through Christ prove that God is just toward sin and willing to justify sinners? (See also Romans 6:23.)

14. How do the following verses deepen our understanding of God's justice and righteousness in salvation?

Psalm 33:5

Psalm 89:14

Psalm 103:6

Isaiah 9:7

Isaiah 51:5

Sixth Day: Review Romans 3:21-26.

God has made the way to be declared right with Him.

15. How have you responded to God's provision of righteousness for you through faith in Jesus?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 3:21-26

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture



After completing the daily questions, listen to this week's lecture. Some groups listen together, but you can also access it online by scanning the QR code.

Lecture Notes

[illegible]

Lesson 5 Notes

Romans 3:21-26

Focus Verse

“This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
(Romans 3:22-23)

Outline

- Salvation Through Faith – Romans 3:21-23
- Salvation by Grace – Romans 3:24
- Salvation in Christ – Romans 3:25-26

Engage

We sometimes possess the ability to right a wrong, mend a misunderstanding, or repair a relationship; other times, we do not. Even a genuine apology can be refused. While a friend or loved one’s forgiveness offers relief, the rejection of an insufficient or misguided effort to make amends fails to bring the comfort we seek. We often try to justify and defend our hurtful behavior, yet some offenses exceed justification. Some transgressions create chasms that even our best attempts cannot span.

Paul’s convincing presentation of humanity’s fallen condition in Romans 1:1–3:20 leaves us speechless and defenseless, rightly accountable before God. Sin’s destructive force has separated us from our loving and righteous Creator. There is nothing we can say or do to justify ourselves and build a bridge back to God. But now, in the closing verses of Romans 3, glorious hope dawns like the rising sun, illuminating the only acceptable path to restoration. **God has made the way to be declared right with Him.** That way is through faith in Jesus Christ.

■ Salvation Through Faith – Romans 3:21-23

These verses mark the glorious turning point in Paul’s letter, the hinge upon which the door to the gospel opens. Since the letter began, Paul exposed humanity’s blatant rejection of God’s revealed truth in creation, our inability to keep God’s revealed law, and the power of sin over every person born since Adam and Eve. **From the grim truth of God’s wrath against universal sin arises the wonderful news of God’s grace to sinners through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.**

New Reality Revealed – 3:21a

The tremendously beautiful words “But now” introduce God’s salvation plan to the Romans and all future readers. Theologian Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones called these words the turning point in God’s

dealings with humanity.¹ Fellow Bible scholar Ray C. Stedman referred to verse 21 as “God’s great ‘nevertheless’ in the face of man’s failure.”² **Paul’s simple words introduce good news of great importance, echoed by all other gospel messengers.** The teaching recorded here repeats and expands on Paul’s previously stated thesis,³ emphasizing the gospel’s power and importance.

The glorious news that unfolds in Romans 3:21 overrules the bad news echoed through the book’s first chapters. In Greek, “made known” is sometimes translated as “revealed.” **Now, instead of God’s wrath,⁴ His righteousness is being made known.** God does not keep His salvation plan secret.

All of this good news, especially God’s mercy and compassion, is rooted in His character. We do not deserve grace, but God gives it. We are not worthy, but He loves us enough to extend a way out of the chasm sin creates. That is one reason the message is called the gospel, or good news.

Righteousness Apart from Law – 3:21b

After proving his point about sin through Old Testament citations,⁵ Paul continued anchoring his good news in the Old Testament Scriptures: “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and Prophets testify.” **The testimony of the Old Testament law foreshadowed Jesus’s perfection and sacrificial death, while the prophets testified to righteousness that would come through God’s promised Messiah.**⁶

Paul’s explanation of God’s salvation plan contains theological words and concepts—terms largely unused in modern culture—rising from the timeless testimony of the Old Testament law and prophets. Revisiting these familiar concepts tethered the heartstrings of Paul’s original readers to generations of Abraham’s descendants. **For both Jews and Gentiles, whether ancient or modern, examining God’s salvation plan through an Old Testament lens magnifies the glory of the gospel.**

Israel’s moral law, a gift from God, established behavioral boundaries, restrained evil, and made God’s people distinct from surrounding nations. The inability to perfectly follow God’s moral law aroused awareness of sin,⁷ revealing humanity’s need for a Savior. Obedience to the law or any other behavioral standard cannot save anyone. **Even though God gave the law as a blessing, salvation requires receiving God’s righteousness apart from human efforts or work.**

In Paul’s day and our own, all religions except Christianity suppose people can and must aid their salvation through personal effort. Only Christianity humbles all who believe before God in complete dependence on Him to save them. **The Bible insists that people can add nothing to what God has done on humanity’s behalf through Jesus Christ.** Believers obediently follow Jesus as a grateful response rather than a saving necessity.⁸ Because mercy has been extended to us, we are to be a humble people who reflect that love, care, compassion, and mercy to others.

1. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “The Turning Point: But Now,” February 22, 1957, MLJ Trust, audio, <https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons/book-of-romans/the-turning-point-but-now/>.

2. Ray C. Stedman, “But Now,” 1976, Ray Stedman Ministries, transcript and audio, 40:50, <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/romans/but-now>.

3. **Paul’s thesis:** Romans 1:1-5, 15-16

4. **Wrath revealed:** Romans 1:18

5. **Old Testament proof:** Romans 3:10-18

6. **Old Testament testimony:** Luke 24:25-27

7. **Consciousness of sin:** Romans 3:20

8. **Follow Jesus:** Luke 9:23; 14:27

Righteousness by Faith – 3:22a

Paul left no doubt about how to access God's saving righteousness: "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe." **Faith in Jesus Christ is the channel through which salvation comes to us and becomes ours.** The only means by which any person can be declared right with God is by believing and receiving what He offers through the work of Jesus Christ. Even in Paul's day, many felt God's plan to give righteousness by faith alone made escaping judgment too easy. However, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit's saving work eclipses any human methodology, tradition, pattern, or promise. The result? We are left to marvel at how God accomplished what we never could.

Based on Paul's progressing discourse, we learn that faith, while essential, is not a work to achieve or accomplish. Like every good thing we experience or possess,⁹ faith comes as God's gift. Ephesians 2:8-9 explicitly states, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." **Faith joyfully receives what Scripture affirms and God freely offers.**

No Difference – 3:22b-23

The church in Rome represented a multiethnic cross section of the Roman Empire. Though the Jewish law restrained some specific sins for Abraham's descendants, Paul effectively argued, "There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Both Jews and Gentiles suffer under sin's corruption. There are no exceptions. **Because of our shared fallen condition, all people equally need restoration to a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.** God's plan for salvation by faith miraculously reaches beyond ethnicity, economics, and education to every person. In their saved state, formerly estranged people are reconciled to God and others. This salvation is both individual and corporate. It saves believers and connects fellow believers to one another.

■ Salvation by Grace – Romans 3:24

Because sin corrupts every person's moral, intellectual, and volitional capabilities,¹⁰ God offers a magnificent, multifaceted plan to save us. God's grace—His delight in saving the undeserving—shines beautifully at the center of the gospel. **God's glorious grace joins together the great truths of justification and redemption.** These terms easily stirred wonder in Paul's original readers. But all who believe today can also rejoice that we "are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

Justified – Paul clarified that justification comes by way of God's grace. Paul's original readers understood justification as a legal term. When a judge acquits someone of crimes, the judge declares them justified. Regardless of guilt or innocence, the judge's declaration or verdict of innocence gives the person right standing with the law. This news dramatically changes an accused person's life. **Similarly, God declares believers in right standing before Him—no penalty remains for their sinful offenses.** They are justified!

9. Good gifts: James 1:17

10. Sin's corruption: Romans 3:9-20

Righteousness from God

The Doctrine of Salvation

Salvation is God's multifaceted gift of grace¹ that delivers fallen humanity from sin's penalty, sin's power, and eventually from sin's presence. Paul's meticulously presented gospel declares that God freely provides His own righteousness for people who possess no true righteousness of their own.² This perfect righteousness becomes ours through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, making it possible for God to declare sinners justified—no longer awaiting sin's penalty. The Lord Jesus, humanity's sacrifice of atonement, died to redeem fallen people from slavery to sin's power. This action connects us to God and to others. It is the basis for the formation of the Church, a spiritual community consisting of those who have experienced God's forgiveness in Christ. No Christian is to go it alone. The redeemed, who receive God's gracious gift of salvation through faith, will enjoy eternity in God's presence, where sin and its influence will be no more.³

Paul proved "there is no one righteous, not even one."⁴ Every human needs God's gracious rescue regardless of ethnicity, economics, or intellect.⁵ Because God desires to save humanity from His wrath,⁶ His gift of righteousness gives immunity from His just wrath against sin.⁷ **Salvation is possible only because God undertook the work of justification, redemption, and atonement and imparts the glorious results through faith alone.⁸**

God's Spirit and the Bible work together to open our hearts and minds to the salvation that God alone makes possible through faith in Christ. **Apart from receiving God's gift of salvation, we labor to justify ourselves to God through religious observances, pious works, and empty spirituality.** When we deny that only God's power can give us His righteousness, we reject accountability to God, assume our best is acceptable, and march toward His just judgment already condemned.⁹

The gospel eternally transforms the lives of all who place their faith in Christ. Former enemies of God become His friends. Those who were once far from Him enjoy a restored, loving relationship, free from fear that sin will ever again taint their right standing with God. Salvation also connects us to others and frees us to encourage one another as we seek to reflect what God has done for us. **People freed from sin's downward spiral stand as witnesses to God's grace, which He extends to any who would believe in Christ's atoning sacrifice.** Will you accept God's gift of salvation through faith and dare to tell others the good news that God offers it to them as well?

1. **God's gift:** John 3:16; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9

2. **God's offer of salvation:** Isaiah 55:1; Romans 3:24; Revelation 22:7

3. **No more sin:** Hebrews 12:23

4. **No one righteous:** Romans 3:10

5. **Access for all:** Romans 3:22-24; 10:13; Titus 2:11

6. **God desires salvation:** 1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9

7. **No condemnation:** Isaiah 50:9; John 5:24; Romans 8:1, 34

8. **God's work:** Isaiah 43:25; 44:22; 1 John 1:9

9. **Condemned:** John 3:18

According to the Bible, justification of sinners is only possible by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. How can sinners become right with a holy God? How can humanity be reconciled to the God they rejected? How can God possibly declare guilty people righteous when justice must

be satisfied? Because of His grace, God accepts Jesus's death for sin in place of our death and freely declares those who believe as justified. What joy this brings to all who believe!

Justification is not a process but a once-in-a-lifetime, permanent pronouncement by God Himself. While God knows believers will not live the rest of their lives perfectly, He never reverses His ruling. By His ongoing grace, righteous living grows in a justified believer through a process called sanctification.¹¹ All true Christians, no matter how great their failings, stand before God in His Son's perfect, unchangeable righteousness.

Redeemed – Paul declared that God's grace also brings about redemption by Christ. On one level, Paul's original readers understood commercial redemption as buying and selling. They also understood redemption as a theological term revealing God's heart toward His people. God redeemed Abraham's descendants from Egyptian slavery, declaring His loving desire for a relationship with them. At an astounding cost, God purchased the freedom of His beloved people, who cannot change their fallen condition by themselves. **Because of God's grace, Jesus has freed every believer from slavery to sin by His death on our behalf.**

The prophet Hosea lived a heartrending picture of commercial redemption. Hosea purchased his adulterous wife out of slavery to her sin and sin's betrayal.¹² His wife deserved the suffering resulting from her sin, but Hosea's purchase modeled God's compassion for human helplessness. Apart from redemption by Christ, all people are hopelessly enslaved to sin and its consequences.¹³ **Jesus paid the price for our redemption, "not with perishable things such as silver or gold," but with His own precious blood.**¹⁴

In the Old Testament law, *kopher* referred to a guilty person's redemption. If an ox mortally wounded someone, the negligent owner's life could be taken as repayment. However, the law allowed the ox's owner to pay the redemption price, the *kopher*, to the slain person's family and redeem that person's life. **In the same way, the Lord Jesus's death mercifully delivers believers from the death they deserve—the righteous punishment God has set for sin.**¹⁵

Another Old Testament term for redemption is *goel*, a "kinsman-redeemer" ("guardian-redeemer" in the NIV). Because Jewish law required land to remain within a family, the nearest relative was obligated to redeem property when death or financial hardship threatened its loss. This person was a "kinsman." If he purchased and restored the property to the family, he was a "kinsman-redeemer." Sometimes, the kinsman's duty extended to marrying the widow and raising heirs. Boaz, in the book of Ruth, was such a redeemer.¹⁶ The *goel* had to be a willing close relative able to pay the ransom. A stranger or coerced relative did not qualify. Jesus fully met the *goel* qualifications to become humanity's kinsman-redeemer. He became our kinsman by taking on a human body. By His perfect life, Jesus alone could pay the price for sinful people, and He willingly offered Himself to save us. Redemption by Christ is a stirring display of God's personal, intimate involvement in mending sin's destruction.

If we are "justified freely" yet redemption involves a required price to secure sinners' freedom, some have wondered if salvation is truly free. **Though the Bible speaks of redemption's price, fallen people have no means to pay for their redemption.** Instead, God Himself pays the price through Christ so salvation may be free for the undeserving. What incredible news!

11. Sanctification: Romans 6–8

12. Picture of redemption: Hosea 3

13. Under sin's power: Romans 3:9

14. Redeemed by Christ: 1 Peter 1:18–19

15. Death for sin: Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23

16. Boaz as kinsman-redeemer: Ruth 3

■ Salvation in Christ – Romans 3:25-26

A Sacrifice of Atonement – 3:25a

Paul continued enriching his explanation of God's salvation plan with Old Testament imagery.

The phrase “a sacrifice of atonement” (the Greek word *hilasterion*) and the related terms “atoning sacrifice” (*hilasmos*)¹⁷ and “make atonement” (*hilaskomai*)¹⁸ are rare in the New Testament. However, they support and deepen modern readers' understanding of atonement by pointing back to God's provision for sin's forgiveness under the law.

God gave Israel an annual remembrance that testified to their need for an atoning sacrifice—the Day of Atonement. The ark of the covenant, a gold-covered wooden box, contained stone tablets with instructions God gave Moses on Mount Sinai. This was the second set of tablets; Moses had broken the first set when the people forsook God for a golden calf.¹⁹ The ark's lid was called the atonement cover or mercy seat. The lid featured two golden cherubim standing on opposite ends and facing one another. Their wings stretched upward and almost met directly over the ark. God's presence would meet with the high priest above the mercy seat, between the outstretched wings of the cherubim.²⁰

God's people could not keep God's law. The law contained within the ark bore witness to the people's sin, which God does not ignore. Sin must be punished. God's judgment against all lawbreakers is deserved. But God does not leave His people in a state of guilt. **On the Day of Atonement, God instructed the high priest to make atonement for the people's sins by sprinkling the blood of a sacrificial animal on the atonement cover.** Symbolically, the blood of the innocent substitute covered the broken law. God declared the sin punished, satisfying His wrath and justice.

In grace, God lovingly established the sacrifice of atonement and justified all who came to Him through faith. The sacrificial animal pointed forward to the Lord Jesus Christ, who became the ultimate sacrifice for atonement. Jesus, and only Jesus, provides the perfectly sufficient atonement sacrifice.²¹ His shed blood brings redemption and a renewed relationship between people and God. **With Jesus as the final, once-for-all sacrifice for sin, God gloriously cleansed sin, fulfilling what the Day of Atonement foreshadowed.**

God's Past, Righteous Justice – 3:25b

Paul anticipated the question, “What about the sins of people who lived before Jesus?” Paul explained that God's salvation plan had looked forward to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, who paid the penalties for past sins. **Eternal God always planned to provide Jesus as the ultimate atoning sacrifice.**²² Consequently, “he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.” God's forbearance, His loving patience toward sinners, demonstrated that He is supremely righteous and merciful. God does not forgive sinners by ignoring their sin. Rather, despite their sin, He declares believers righteous. All because Christ paid the penalty they owed.

17. **Sacrifice of atonement:** 1 John 2:2; 4:10

18. **Make atonement:** Hebrews 2:17

19. **Tablets:** Exodus 31:18; 32:19-20; 34:1, 28-29

20. **Atonement cover:** Exodus 25:17-22

21. **Jesus, not animals:** Hebrews 10

22. **Slain from the creation:** Revelation 13:8

For centuries, God graciously refused to condemn imperfect heroes of the faith who trusted in Him. **He stored up His judicial wrath and poured it all on His Son at the cross.**²³ God has always justified sinful people by their faith. We see God's grace extended to people such as Abraham, who compromised his wife's honor to save his own life,²⁴ and Moses, who killed an Egyptian.²⁵ David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband.²⁶ And Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho.²⁷ God's people lived by faith, despite their failings.

God counted all these sinful people righteous and delighted in fellowship with them.²⁸ He called Abraham His friend²⁹ and David "a man after his own heart."³⁰ He spoke face-to-face with Moses³¹ and gave Rahab a privileged position in Jesus's ancestry.³² Was God unjust when He forgave them? No! **The death of Christ vindicated God's righteous forbearance of past sins.** The cross proclaims that God acted justly when He justified the ungodly.

God's Present, Righteous Justice – 3:26

In the first 2½ chapters of Romans, Paul proved that humanity's biggest problem is God's wrath, His righteous anger against sin. The Creator of all things determines the standards for His creation, and His standard is perfection. No one can grasp the greatness of God's grace without coming to terms with God's wrath against wickedness. Human beings could not appease God's wrath with the animal sacrifices God ordained or by following the law He gave. God knew people could never save themselves by working toward a standard they could never meet. In mercy, God gave a law people could not perfectly follow to reveal their need for the Savior He would send. **Paul declared that God has eternally achieved justice and satisfied His wrath through Jesus's death.**

God has made the way to be declared right with Him. His wrath against sin and its harmful consequences flows from His overwhelming, protective love. God's loving sacrifice of His one and only Son³³ not only covered (expiated) sin's guilt but appeased (propitiated) God's wrath against sin so we may have a renewed relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

In Romans 1:16, Paul expressed his enthusiasm for the gospel, "because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes." After he clarified humanity's sin, which only God's power could overcome, Paul offered the best news condemned sinners could hope to hear. **For all who would believe, the righteousness of God has been revealed.** Only God could save humanity from His wrath and remain perfectly righteous in doing so. Only God could judge sin while rescuing sinners. Only God could make a way for depraved sinners to meet His righteous standards. That is exactly what He has done by grace through Jesus Christ.

23. **Once for all:** Hebrews 9:26

24. **Abraham:** Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18

25. **Moses:** Exodus 2:11-15

26. **David:** 2 Samuel 11

27. **Rahab:** Joshua 2:1-21; 6:22-25

28. **Sinful people righteous:** Romans 4:3; James 2:25

29. **His friend:** 2 Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23

30. **His own heart:** 1 Samuel 13:14

31. **Face-to-face:** Exodus 33:11; Numbers 12:8; Deuteronomy 34:10

32. **Jesus's ancestor:** Matthew 1:5; Hebrews 11:31

33. **Sacrifice of Son:** John 3:16

How did Christ's death accomplish salvation? First, through justification. God legally declares the guilty righteous, justice achieved, and sin's penalty paid. Second, by redemption. Jesus, our dear Savior, brought us out of sin's powerful bondage, restored us to our heavenly Father, and set us free from sin's eternal consequence—death. And third, because of atonement. Jesus's blood covers a believer's guilt and satisfies God's wrath against their sins—past, present, and future. **Sin has been forever overcome by one God, through one Savior, with one grace-filled plan to offer salvation to all.**

Apply It

The amazing truth in this passage unfolds the heart of Romans and the entire Bible. God's compassion for sinners and plan to redeem them by His grace has been at work since humanity first fell into sin's corruption.³⁴ Unfortunately, today's readers often view the Old Testament books and prophets as unrelatable and irrelevant to their lives. Paul has carefully connected the message of the Old Testament with the reality of the gospel of Christ. God's laws for holy living, the rise and fall of His chosen nation, and prophecies of purifying judgment and restoration all point to God's deliberate intervention in human affairs to bring His plan of salvation to fruition. The glorious gospel is now made known to us in Jesus Christ. What encouragement do you gain from understanding God's heart to save humanity? How might the testimony of the Old Testament law and prophets heighten your appreciation for those books and increase your wonder at God's tireless saving work across the ages?

God's gift of salvation transcends every distinction we draw between people. He offers salvation to all who recognize their need for His righteousness and receive Christ's gift. Faith in Jesus's sacrifice makes salvation accessible to people of every language, skin color, economic status, gender, age, and background. If a person has a heartbeat, Jesus died so they could be justified and redeemed. Whom might you consider too far from God to turn to Christ for salvation? All who enjoy salvation today were hopeless cases apart from God's intervention. Will you pray that God deepens your understanding that all are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus? What helps you see everyone as God does and delight to share this powerful gospel?

God's gracious generosity in salvation invites us to worship Him and calls us to reflect His kindness and mercy to a world that desperately needs His righteousness. Does the good news of the gospel humble you before the Lord with deep wonder and gratitude? The gospel's breathtaking news of God's great power to save sinners reveals His grace. No human would conceive a plan where we are not the story's hero. We struggle to accept that we cannot offer God anything to appease His wrath against our sin, but the gospel frees us from trying to earn what God has freely given through Christ. Righteousness before God does not depend on our family, good deeds, intelligence, Bible study attendance, church denomination, or religious observances. Do you struggle to accept that your salvation only requires faith in Christ? Will you give up trying to make yourself acceptable to God and instead receive Christ's righteousness and the full benefits of His blood-bought redemption? If you have already been justified through your faith in Christ, how will you resist the ongoing temptation to make yourself or someone else the hero of your ongoing Christian journey? God has made the way to be righteous; His way always has been and always will be through Jesus!

34. First prophecy of salvation: Genesis 3:15

ROMANS:
From Guilt to Grace

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 3:27-31

LESSON:
6



Justification by Faith, Part 1

Lesson 6 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 5 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What truth about salvation from the lecture struck you most, and why?

2. From the notes, what aspect of Paul's message contains good news for you or someone you love?

Second Day: Read Romans 3:27-28.

Paul revealed faith's impact on pride.

3.
 - a. From verse 27, what is excluded? Why?

 - b. What impact does faith have on pride? Why?

4.
 - a. When might we be tempted to boast about our spirituality or relationship with God?

b. What are some results of this type of boasting?

5. In what situations are you tempted to justify yourself to God, and how can you guard against self-righteousness?

Third Day: Reread Romans 3:27-28.

Paul declared faith's role in salvation.

6. a. Describe characteristics of saving faith by which sinners are justified. (See also John 1:12; 3:14-18; 20:30-31; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 10:9; Hebrews 11; or other verses.)
- b. How do people understand and use the word "faith" in your culture? How does this understanding compare with the biblical definition?
7. Looking back to last week's lesson, explain in your own words why justification by faith apart from works is good news.
8. In what ways does your faith in Jesus impact your life choices and relationships?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 3:29-30.

Paul affirmed there is one God and one path to justification.

9. Who are Gentiles, and why would Jews in Paul's day look down on them? (See also Romans 2:17, 23, 25. Use a dictionary if necessary.)
10. How does the fact that "there is only one God" and one salvation compare with modern thoughts on spirituality?

11. What truths from Romans 3:21-30 could you share to respond graciously to people who see all religions as viable options or believe there are many gods or many ways to God?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 3:31.

Paul asserted that justification by faith upholds God's law.

12. a. In your own words, summarize what God's law requires. (See also Exodus 20:1-17; Romans 6:23; 13:8-10.)
- b. What role does the law play in a person's ability to attain righteousness? (See also Romans 3:20; Galatians 3:24.)
- c. How did Jesus fulfill the law? (See Romans 3:25-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 2:17; 4:15.)
13. If God has justified you through faith, give examples of how He encourages and enables your loving obedience. (See also Romans 8:12-17, 31-34; Philippians 2:12-13; 1 John 1:5-10.)

Sixth Day: Review Romans 3:27-31.

God justifies people through faith in Christ alone.

14. What does God's plan to justify sinners through faith alone reveal about Him? How have you responded to His invitation to faith in Jesus as your Savior?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 3:27-31

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture



After completing the daily questions, listen to this week's lecture. Some groups listen together, but you can also access it online by scanning the QR code.

Lecture Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Lesson 6 Notes

Romans 3:27-31

Focus Verse

“For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”
(Romans 3:28)

Outline

- Faith Excludes Boasting – Romans 3:27-28
- Faith Necessary for All – Romans 3:29-30
- Faith Upholds Law – Romans 3:31

Engage

People live in seemingly constant competition for limited resources. Maybe you contend indirectly for income-generating work to buy what you need—food, clothing, shelter. Or perhaps you compete directly for access to clean water, agricultural land, or building materials. We struggle alongside other people who share the same basic needs to live and flourish. So many things in this life require focused effort and constant work. How do basic human needs impact your life each day? Have you focused on tangible resources at the expense of your spiritual needs? There is good news. **Your deepest need cannot be met through your struggle or competition.**

The good news of salvation by grace through faith alone negates human contribution and transforms competition. The limitless resource of God’s righteousness shimmers before us in this lesson. We will never be more worthy of salvation than anyone else. Likewise, we will never be less worthy. Paul sought to help his readers understand that Jesus is the standard God uses to evaluate righteousness and bestow the blessing of justification—not titles, positions, or accomplishments. **God justifies people through faith in Christ alone.** Paul invites all people to believe in Jesus rather than pursue salvation through efforts that will always fall short.

So far in his epistle, Paul has explained sin as the problem all people have and God-pleasing righteousness as the need all people share. **But God has always given all people access to His righteousness through the same means—faith.** We will explore this important teaching in two parts:

- In Lesson 6, we will study Paul’s premise that justification comes only by faith in Jesus Christ, nothing else.
- In Lesson 7, we will study Paul’s proof that God has always justified people by faith in the truth He has revealed.

Because God justifies sinners by faith alone, no one can boast and everyone is welcome. **Jesus—who perfectly upheld God’s law—receives all the glory for our salvation.**

■ Faith Excludes Boasting – Romans 3:27-28

God makes salvation possible through His provision of a Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus became the ultimate atoning sacrifice, redeeming people from sin and securing their justification. How do people under sin's power access the justification Jesus provides? By faith in Jesus's saving work. **Justification by faith leaves nothing for which any mere human can take sole credit.**

Boasting and Pride – 3:27a

This passage begins with a question followed by its answer, "Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded." **Boasting expresses prideful thoughts and beliefs with self-elevating words or actions.** Praise that exalts us comes at the expense of acknowledging what God has done. The sin of pride reveals humanity's fallen condition. Paul's previous discussion of sin provided examples of pride rooted in human hearts.¹ People claiming to be wiser than their Creator become fools. People who judge others for sins they also commit condemn themselves. People who brag about knowing God's law dishonor Him by breaking it.

Sins of pride have plagued humanity since our beginning. When tempted in God's perfect garden, Eve expressed a prideful desire to "be like God, knowing good and evil."² The king of Babylon said, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; ... I will make myself like the Most High."³ Jesus referred to Satan's prideful fall from heaven.⁴ All forms of human competition or comparison with God attempt to diminish Him and bring Him to the level of a created being. However, the incomprehensible creator God exceeds His creation just as a craftsman exceeds the final product his efforts produce.

Sinful pride still plagues humanity today. Cultures around the world celebrate pride in oneself, one's family, or one's position as a valuable character trait. However, Proverbs 16:18 warns, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." Pride's self-focus crowds out thoughts of God and the desire to seek, know, and follow Him.⁵ Pride also breeds competition, which overtakes concern for others made in God's image.⁶ **By grace, God's plan for salvation through faith alone frees humanity from self-exaltation's snare.**

Boasting and Law – 3:27b

Paul's rhetorical argument challenged his original audience to offer a law that people could keep or work they could do to earn justification. No such law or work exists, not even in the realm of religion. What is more, Paul had already recalled Jewish unfaithfulness to God's law.⁷ Paul further proved his assertion that justification by faith excludes boasting by asking: "Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith." **If justification required law-keeping, our inherent inability to perform perfectly would lead to failure, not boasting.**⁸

1. Examples of pride: Romans 1:22-23; 2:1, 23

2. Eve's prideful desire: Genesis 3:5

3. King's boast: Isaiah 14:13-15

4. Satan's fall: Luke 10:18

5. Self above God: Psalm 10:4

6. God's image-bearers: Genesis 1:26

7. Jewish unfaithfulness: Romans 3:1-4

8. Law-keeping: Galatians 3:24

Religious pride tempted many Jews of Jesus's day to demand God's approval and claim their pious efforts made them worthy of justification. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus contrasted the prayers of a tax collector and a pharisee to confront such religious pride. The Pharisee boasted, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." Meanwhile, the tax collector humbly admitted he was a sinner needing God's mercy.⁹ The Pharisee did not grasp that all people are under sin's power and unable to justify themselves through keeping the law.¹⁰ But the tax collector received forgiveness and salvation through faith in God's mercy, displayed in the temple sacrifices that foreshadowed Jesus's death.

Approximately 2,000 years of human advancement have not cured prideful attempts to create systems of religious laws or good works about which people can boast. **Pride resists complete reliance on God for salvation.** Consequently, people still long to redefine goodness according to socially acceptable and achievable standards rather than God's superior righteousness. Even perfect adherence to flawed systems of morality or religion that human beings create offers no reason to boast. Successfully meeting manmade standards does not earn God's approval. Instead, celebrating religious success highlights self-promotion and prideful tendencies, tarnishing otherwise good works.

The good works of studying the Bible and serving others can lead to either prideful boasting or a closer relationship with Jesus. Paul, a former Pharisee trained by the esteemed Gamaliel and perhaps the brightest Christian theologian of his day, resolved to "boast in the Lord."¹¹ He boasted of Christ crucified and raised to life, rather than human wisdom or his own knowledge. Faith rises from knowledge of the gospel and God's redemptive plan. Even so, mere knowledge is not the same as saving faith.

Boasting and Faith – 3:28

Paul maintained the gloriously simple truth "that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." This truth invites readers of Paul's day and ours to joyfully and humbly receive God's gracious justification. Unfortunately, prideful tendencies often tempt us to turn faith into a work about which we can boast. Rather than accepting saving faith as a gift we cannot earn, we can turn belief into a rule we must follow—a perceived mandate that promises earthly honor and heavenly rewards. Manufactured, frail faith, however, inevitably leads to shame when it fails to withstand difficult circumstances. The faith we create ourselves is not real and cannot save.

In contrast, biblical faith is God's instrument of our salvation, not a reason for boasting. We are not justified because of our faith or on account of our faith. The Bible says we are justified by faith or through faith. Faith is the God-given channel by which God's righteousness in Christ becomes ours. God is at work in and through us. **Faith unites a person to the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness.** We are saved by the perfect life, work, death, and resurrection of the Lord. Jesus's appearance on our behalf in the presence of God saves us. His righteousness, credited to us by God, saves us. The righteousness we receive is entirely Christ's. Salvation by grace through faith undercuts all boasting of any personal effort to achieve faith, if that were even possible.¹²

9. Jesus confronted pride: Luke 18:9-14

10. All under sin: Romans 3:9-18

11. Paul's boast: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

12. Boasting in Christ: 1 Corinthians 1:28-31; Ephesians 2:8-10

Faith Alone

The Doctrine of Faith

Justification by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ is the only true gospel. Christ's righteousness becomes our own through faith, which is God's gift.¹ **God-given faith makes belief possible for fallen people with fractured minds and broken lives.**² True faith propels people to act on their belief. God's gift of faith exceeds mere intellectual understanding or mental agreement with the Bible or theology; even demons believe this way.³ A person can know that Jesus lived, died on the cross, and rose from the dead. However, saving faith requires a heart that acknowledges and surrenders to Christ as Savior.⁴ The gift of faith enables us to receive the truth about Jesus⁵ into our minds and allow its transformative root in our hearts.⁶ By God's power, the roots of saving faith persevere through hardship and temptation.

The gospel Paul proclaimed⁷ clearly presents Jesus as the object of saving faith that results in justification and righteousness. God freely offered Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for humanity's redemption. **People actively receive God's gift of faith by affirming Jesus Christ as God's Son and their Savior.** True faith incorporates belief that Jesus died for our sin, was raised from the dead for our justification, and ascended to heaven, exalted to reign with God. Such faith brings us into a community of faith, connecting us with others seeking to walk with God. Believers confidently anticipate that Jesus will return to vanquish evil forever and complete all He has promised. As faith grows, Jesus becomes the central object of our loving devotion and ruler of our lives.⁸

Without faith in Jesus, people can outwardly identify as Christians without experiencing the transforming effects of Christ's reign on their hearts, minds, and behavior. Faith in Jesus as risen Lord demands humble surrender, not self-exaltation. **When we continue treating Jesus like He needs our help to save us, we tragically pursue rituals and good deeds to prove we are worthy of God's favor and affection.** This ignores the saving truth the Bible proclaims.

Believing that faith is the only way to receive Jesus's righteousness as our own frees us from competing for a position in God's kingdom or trying to prove our worth. Faith in God's love for us shatters self-rule, inviting us into the safety of surrendering our lives to the one who controls everything in creation. Jesus's perfect saving work and God's endless grace secure our eternity and reorder today's priorities. We live for Jesus—who died for us—and delight in serving those He loves and seeks to save through faith alone.

1. **God's gift of faith:** Ephesians 2:8-9

2. **Fallen people:** Romans 3:10-18

3. **Demons believe:** James 2:19

4. **Confess and believe:** Romans 10:9

5. **Truth about Jesus:** Matthew 16:16; John 1:12; 3:16; Acts 4:12

6. **Truth takes root:** Matthew 13:3-8, 13-23

7. **Paul's gospel:** Romans 3

8. **Surrender to Jesus:** Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 9:23; 14:25-27; Acts 3:19; 20:21; Romans 12:1-2

Faith in the glorious truths about Jesus exalts Him and eclipses human pride. Jesus alone was sent from heaven to show God's love by dying to save all who would believe.¹³ Only faith in Jesus's words and saving work moves condemned people from death to life.¹⁴ Jesus is the only light powerful enough to scatter sin's darkness.¹⁵ Jesus, the resurrected Lord of all, alone has the power to save.¹⁶ By faith alone in Jesus—who is gloriously worthy of our boasts—are sinful people justified before a holy God.

■ Faith Necessary for All – Romans 3:29-30

Justification by faith denies every attempt to consider ourselves superior to others. Paul's next questions confronted bigotry and invited humble unity among Roman believers in Paul's day and among Christians today. While boasting leads to alienation from God and one another, justification by grace through faith leads to reconciliation. **God invites all people to access justification by faith alone.**¹⁷

God of the Jews – 3:29a

Paul asked the Roman church, "Is God the God of Jews only?" Some erroneously believed so. The Jewish nation owed their existence to the loving favor God showed their ancestor Abraham.¹⁸ As God promised, Abraham's descendants grew into a large nation who were called to serve the one true God and to be a light to the peoples around them.¹⁹ The Shema reflects their monotheistic belief: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."²⁰ While the Israelites did not remain faithful to their calling, their monotheism separated them from their polytheistic neighbors, who did not acknowledge the one true God. **While believing foreigners such as Ruth and Rahab²¹ joined God's people, many Jews failed to understand that God's affection toward non-Jews was for the good of the world, ultimately through Jesus.**²²

Jewish devotion to the law of the one true God meant that some in the early Church struggled to understand how Gentiles could become part of God's people without fully adhering to the Mosaic code. Insistence on adherence risked creating division within the body of Christ. Jews believed Gentiles' only hope of salvation was in becoming Jewish and following Jewish law and customs. If following Jewish law was the only path to justification, their exclusivity and boasting would be appropriate. Instead, God's grace abundantly flows to all people equally entrapped by sin. **God affirmed justification by faith apart from the Jewish law when He also freely gave His Spirit to believing Gentiles.**²³ Consequently, early church leaders released believing Gentiles from circumcision and conversion to Judaism.²⁴

13. Jesus lifted up: John 3:13-17; 20:31

14. Jesus brings life: John 11:25; 14:6

15. Jesus the light: John 12:46

16. Faith's profession: Romans 10:9

17. God's invitation: 1 Timothy 2:3-4

18. Loving favor: Deuteronomy 10:15

19. One true God: Genesis 12:1-9; Exodus 20:1-6

20. Lord is one: Deuteronomy 6:4

21. Foreigners included: Matthew 1:1-16

22. Chosen to bless: Isaiah 42

23. Holy Spirit to Gentiles: Acts 10:44-46; 15:1-10

24. Gentiles and law: Acts 15:11-29

God of the Gentiles – 3:29b

Paul followed his question in verse 29 with another question and immediate answer, “Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too.” Through faith in Jesus Christ, all people can be redeemed from sin and reconciled to God. God graciously revealed His eternal power and divine nature²⁵ to all people through His creation. Additionally, God revealed His holiness and sovereignty through Israel’s law and history. Through faith in Jesus, Gentiles, like Jews, are liberated from degrading idolatry and invited into fellowship with their creator, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.²⁶

One God, One Justification – 3:30

To both Jew and Gentile Paul declared, “There is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.” **The one true God is equally God of all the people He has created.**²⁷ God offers salvation on the same terms to both Gentiles and Jews: justification by His grace through faith. God’s impartial character and inexhaustible righteousness undergird a believer’s call to proclaim the gospel to all peoples worldwide.

The gospel of the one true, living God refuses confinement to any one sect or nation. **Jesus’s death secured one justification for all who believe—from every nation, tribe, and tongue.**

Because of sin, regardless of good works or evil actions, understanding or lack of understanding, we are all equally disadvantaged before our holy God. Through God-given faith, the gospel offers the whole world access to the same hope.

Faith Upholds Law – Romans 3:31

In chapter 3, Paul twice repeated that salvation by grace is apart from the law.²⁸ Did his original readers question the law’s role for Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus Christ? Did they wonder if God’s grace set the law aside or if God had changed His mind about moral standards? **Paul asked and answered a question on his readers’ behalf: “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.”** Justification by grace through faith upholds the law of God. Romans 6–8 will make the point that through the Spirit believers are empowered to do what God calls us to do.

Paul was beginning to address an erroneous belief system called “antinomianism,” which he addresses in greater detail in Romans 5 and 6. Some forms of antinomianism include the belief that since salvation through faith in Jesus is for the soul, people can use their bodies as they desire. In other words, behavior makes no difference for those who believe in Christ. This belief system also proposes that the Holy Spirit’s teaching and God’s grace render God’s law irrelevant; nothing matters but the law of love, as people define it. **These false beliefs dishonor God, denying His good purposes in His law and gracious salvation through faith.**

God, the creator of everything, gave the law to teach Israel how to live as God’s people in God’s world, promoting relational flourishing with Him and with one another.²⁹ **Jesus affirmed the**

25. God revealed: Romans 1:19-20

26. Gentiles welcome: Acts 17:22-31

27. God of all: Romans 2:11-12

28. Apart from law: Romans 3:21, 28

29. Law a guide: Psalm 119

ongoing value of God's law by summing up the whole law in the two Greatest Commandments.³⁰

The first is, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." The second is, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Even though people cannot perfectly keep the law, the gospel of Jesus Christ does not void God's law.

Jesus explicitly stated, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."³¹ **Jesus's life, death, and resurrection perfectly fulfilled the law's requirements, making faith in Jesus the only way sinful people can truly satisfy the law's demands.**³² God's salvation plan through Jesus fulfills the law in two crucial areas: justice and righteousness.

Jesus and Justice

Justification by grace through faith upholds the law's demand for justice. According to the law, sin's penalty is death.³³ By offering Jesus as a sacrifice for sin, God honored what His law required. **Jesus suffered the law's just penalty in our place.** God bases salvation on what Jesus's death accomplished rather than what we can or cannot do. Jesus eternally satisfied sin's penalty for those who look to Him in faith.³⁴ In this costly way, God upheld the law and provided the way to save sinners. Jesus's sacrifice for atonement demonstrates God's righteousness in punishing sin. God is "just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."³⁵

Jesus and Righteousness

Justification by grace through faith upholds the law's demand for authentic righteousness. True righteousness fulfills the law at every point. The law reflects God's perfect holiness, making it impossible for sinners to fulfill. But Jesus, eternally God from the beginning and "fully human in every way,"³⁶ lived without sin, perfectly fulfilling the law for us.³⁷ Through faith, God credits the actual, unchanging, perfect righteousness of Jesus to every believer's account. **God justifies people through faith in Christ alone.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God's wise and perfect plan for justification by faith alone secures all glory and honor for Jesus Christ—who accomplished salvation for all who believe. Jesus's perfect life, death, and resurrection make available God's perfect righteousness, which we could never achieve ourselves. Access to this righteousness by faith apart from works abolishes pride's self-exalting drive, freeing people from the burden of boasting to prove their worth to God and others. Faith alone invites the whole world to experience the justification only God can provide through Christ, regardless of their background, heritage, or spiritual knowledge.

30. Greatest Commandments: Matthew 22:36-40

31. Jesus fulfills law: Matthew 5:17-20

32. Believe in Jesus: John 6:29

33. Sin's penalty: Romans 6:23

34. Eternally effective: Hebrews 5:8-9; 9:11-12

35. God is just: Romans 3:25-26

36. Jesus's nature: John 1:1; Hebrews 2:17; 4:15

37. Sinless life: 2 Corinthians 5:21

While God's law reveals His plan for holy living in His world, no one can be justified by keeping the law. The law remains a blessing to God's people, but salvation only comes through faith. Saving faith is not an ideal or goal we labor to achieve. Instead, God graciously gives saving faith that transforms undeserving sinners into saints. God-given faith strengthens believers to endure life's trials and eternally unites them with Christ. **Justification by grace through faith alone reveals God's deep compassion for all people who are equally unable to justify themselves.**

Apply It

Look at me. Notice me. Value me. Love me. These real human desires can draw us to our Creator, who continuously sees us, perfectly knows us, and passionately loves us. Jesus's precious blood, shed for sinners and received by faith alone, proves God's merciful, loving nature and determination to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. What a liberating truth in a world where recreational scrolling through social media channels fuels constant competition for attention and affirmation! How are you tempted to boast about yourself to others? What prideful self-promotion overflows into your relationship with God? Do your prayers echo a sense of entitlement to God's blessings? Perhaps you take credit for your spiritual accomplishments when you see others struggling to stay on the straight and narrow. **Because God loves us, He has ensured that our salvation does not depend on us.** Your justification, or God's not-guilty verdict, depends completely on Jesus's power to live perfectly and love completely. Justification by faith alone frees us to embrace joy and humble gratitude for God's love and Christ's sacrifice. Do you believe this truth? If so, how has faith in Jesus granted you freedom to let go of this world's self-oriented focus and fully cling to Him?

As faith causes truth about Jesus to take root in our hearts, we are transformed. The Holy Spirit sensitizes us to the impacts of immorality in and around us. We recognize humanity's deep need for Jesus. Paul has taught us that even those who reject the one true God have a sense of right and wrong stamped on their consciences.³⁸ When obeyed, God's law and moral standards protect us from sin's brutal consequences. How have you experienced the protective effects of God's law in your own life? We often regret the avoidable consequences of sin we face. **How might you increasingly surrender in faith to Jesus, the Lord and Savior who molds your values, thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors to His own?**

Religious observances and communities of faith offer tangible touchpoints that connect people with shared values and expectations. However, we can wrongly view human expectations as requirements needed to earn God's love, favor, and even justification. What works do you believe God requires you to add to faith in Jesus's life, death, and resurrection as your source of your salvation? People who work hard expect others to work hard. What expectations do you have of others that might limit their access to Jesus or your willingness to share the good news of salvation? **Works-based righteousness creates unbearable burdens for us and uncrossable barriers for others.** When we believe someone is too sinful for Jesus to justify or too wicked to join our church, we forget that the grace we have received is for the benefit of the whole world. How might Paul's message about the one God and His one way of justification through faith impact how you view God and others this week? With whom will you share the good news of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone?

38. Moral conscience: Romans 2

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