

• LESSON 7 (May 25) •

Romans 3:21-31

Justified by His
Grace as a Gift

“**F**or by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” That was the conclusion reached in Romans 3:20. To this point in his letter, the news delivered by Paul has been bleak to say the least.

- The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth (1:18).
- There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek (2:9).
- All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law (2:12).
- Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision (2:25).
- None is righteous, no, not one (3:10).

No one can stand before the perfectly holy, perfectly just, perfectly impartial Creator of the universe and be recognized as perfectly acceptable by his or her own merit. “There is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). Whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor, slave or free, when my works are compared with God’s expectations, I am not shown to be guiltless, upheld as innocent, or vindicated as righteous. Without excuse, exception, or rationalization, I am shown to be guilty, convicted as a lawbreaker, and condemned as out of harmony with the will of my Creator. As such, I am without excuse. I have not given God the honor, thanksgiving, or obedient submission he rightly deserves.

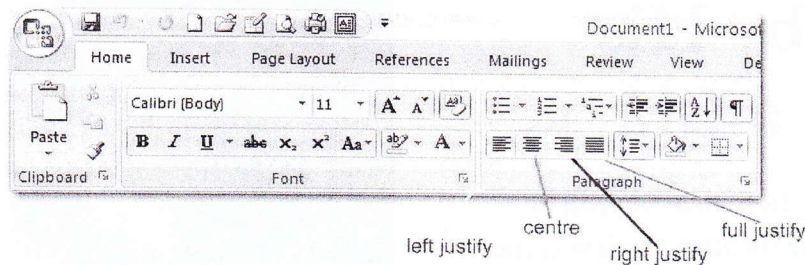


In your own words, what is “sin”?

What makes sin so serious?

What does sin have to do with “falling short of the glory of God”?

Take a moment to think about being “justified.” We take the basic concept for granted nearly every time we use a word processor on a computer.



This leads us to a turning point in Paul’s letter to the Romans. Having shown that mankind is universally accountable to the full horror and destruction of sin, the good news of God’s solution is introduced and will be expounded upon over the course of the next few chapters.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. (3:21-22a)

While Paul will reference a variety of Old Testament passages to support this idea before his letter is concluded, consider a few that might immediately spring to the original reader’s mind:

And [the LORD] brought [Abraham] outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Gen 15:4-6)

Much more to come about Abraham in Romans 4.

Habakkuk 2:4 was already referenced by Paul in Romans 1:17.

“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

This righteousness isn’t new or novel. In fact, its shadow had been growing more substantial for a very long time.

In your own words, what is meant if something or someone is “justified”?

What does the concept of being “justified” have to do with what Paul is communicating in Romans 3?

What does Paul mean by, “the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law”?

Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:21-29)

While the differences were described in Romans 1 and 2, Jews and Gentiles now find themselves in the same boat in more than one way. Both have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Both can be justified before God on exactly the same basis.

For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. (Rom 3:22b-25a)

Remember the bookends of this letter that put its entire scope into context:

- "We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations" (1:5).
- "...the revelation of the mystery ... has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith" (16:26).

How had the Scripture "imprisoned everything under sin"?

If you were going to try and explain to someone what it means to be justified by grace as a gift, how would you go about doing it?

Paul uses the word "redemption" in Romans 3:24. What is redemption?

We don't use the word "propitiation" very often. Take the time to look up the definition. What is a "propitiation"?

What God has accomplished through Christ demonstrates certain things that both Jew and Gentile need to recognize.

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (3:25b-26)

This concept is absolutely key. Take a moment to reflect on what the Spirit of God through Paul is communicating.

- ❖ In putting forward Jesus as a propitiation by his blood, how has God shown himself to be just?
- ❖ In putting forward Jesus as a propitiation by his blood, how has God shown himself to be the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus?

Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. (3:27-30)

CLOSING THOUGHT: For centuries, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. To proclaim justification by faith is to proclaim the fulfillment of what God had planned all along.

Is there any significance to Paul's use of the phrase "passed over" in describing what God had done with former sins? Perhaps Hebrews 10:1-10 will be helpful as you meditate on that phrase.

Paul reaches the end of what we have as three chapters and declares that our boasting is excluded. What does he mean by this declaration?

How does his declaration in Romans 3:27 relate to his declaration in Galatians 6:14?