

Lesson 36 at StudyRomans.org

As we said last week, absent Christ, the book of Romans would have ended with verse 20. Absent Christ, the only message of Romans would have been the message we have seen so far — that you are lost in your sins, and there is nothing you can do about it.

But! But God has done something about it! That is what we find in verse 21, and we should thank God every day for that short little word “but” at the beginning of verse 21.

Everything depends on that little word “but.” We are powerless to save ourselves, **but** God is not. In fact, Paul has already told us about God’s power to save us.

Romans 1:16 — For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for **it is the power of God for salvation** to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

We cannot save ourselves under the law through perfect obedience to that law, but God can save us apart from the law. That is what we are about to see in verse 21.

But before we get to verse 21, let’s briefly talk about something else I mentioned last week — most commentaries agree that verse 21 begins a major new section in the book of Romans.

So far, we have seen two major sections in Paul’s letter to the Romans. First, we saw an introductory section in Romans 1:1-17. Then we saw a second section in which Paul condemns first the Gentiles and then the Jews as lawbreakers. And now, in Romans 3:21, we see the beginning of a new section.

And even before we look at the content of this new section, we already know what we expect to find. Paul just described the worldwide **problem** of sin in the previous section — and so we will not be surprised at all if we see Paul in this next section describing the worldwide **solution** to that worldwide problem of sin.

What should we call this new section? And where does it end? The Handout for Lesson 36 shows five answers to those questions from five different commentaries.

- According to **McGuiggan**, this new section is called “The Solution - Justification by Faith,” and it ends at Romans 5:21.
- According to **Moo**, this new section is called “Justification by Faith,” and it ends at Romans 4:25.
- According to **Schreiner**, this new section is called “The Saving Righteousness of God,” and it ends at Romans 4:25.
- According to **Middendorf**, this new section is not really a new section at all, but is instead still part of the section that started way back at Romans 1:18. He calls that entire section “The Righteousness of God,” and he ends it at Romans 4:25.
- According to **Nygren**, this new section is called “The Righteousness of God,” and it ends at Romans 4:25.

As for where this section ends, as we just saw, the consensus is that it ends at the end of Romans 4, but there is some disagreement on that issue. So let’s leave that as an open question for now and wait until we get there.

As for the name of this new section, there are two primary contenders as shown on the Handout: *Justification by Faith* and *The Righteousness of God*.

Which of those two proposed names should we choose, or should we perhaps just choose both of them given how closely related they are? Again, let's leave that as an open question for now — but based on what we just saw in the prior section, I am already leaning toward the first name on the Handout for this new section — “The **Solution** - Justification by Faith.” Paul just described a worldwide problem — and so now he turns to the worldwide solution to that worldwide problem. But the first thing Paul will mention in this new section is *the righteousness of God*, so we may decide that is the better name.

We are lost in our sins, and there is nothing we can do about it — **but God has done something about it!** And what has God done about it? Let's read verse 21.

Romans 3:21, Continued

Romans 3:21 — But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—

What has God done about our great problem? God has done something **apart** from the law — and that is a very good thing! Why? Because we are all lawbreakers. We all need a plan **apart** from the law.

As lawbreakers, we do not want a plan **under** the law. The law cannot give life to lawbreakers. The law cannot make lawbreakers righteous. Paul makes that point elsewhere.

Galatians 3:21 — 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.**

Galatians 2:21 — I do not nullify the grace of God, for **if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.**

Romans 10:4 — For **Christ is the end of the law** for righteousness to everyone who believes.

And that which God has done is apart from the law, but what has God done? Paul answers that question as well in verse 21. Paul tells us that God has manifested his righteousness. And how has God done that? Paul tells us that elsewhere.

God has manifested his righteousness through Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:30 — And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, **righteousness** and sanctification and redemption.

God has manifested his righteousness through the death of Christ.

Romans 3:25 — Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's **righteousness**, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

God has manifested his righteousness through the gospel of Christ.

Romans 1:16-17 — For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the **righteousness** of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

God has manifested his righteousness through the church of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:21 — For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the **righteousness** of God.

Yes, verse 21 is wonderful. Yes, verse 21 is good news — the best news we could ever hear or ever imagine. But, no, verse 21 should not have come as a surprise to any Jew. Why not? Because the law and the prophets bear witness to it, as Paul tells us at the end of verse 21.

But where? Where do the law and the prophets bear witness to the manifestation of God’s righteousness through Christ? An easier question would be where **don’t** they? Jesus is on every page of the law and the prophets, from the opening page to the closing page.

Here is Jesus on the opening page.

Genesis 1:26 — Then God said, “Let **us** make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness.”

And here is Jesus on the closing page.

Malachi 4:2 — But for you who fear my name, **the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.**

Jesus is on the first page and the last page — and every page in between! If any Jews reacted with surprise to the gospel of Christ, it was only because they did not know God or the word of God.

And Paul will return to that topic later in this same letter when he considers a people who have “a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” (10:2). Paul knew all about such people because Paul himself had previously been such a person.

And for whom did God do all of this? Was it only for the Jews? Or did God do it only for the Gentiles? Or maybe God has two different plans — one plan for the Jews and another plan for the Gentiles? Paul has already answered all of those questions, but Paul will answer all of those questions again in the next verse.

Romans 3:22

Romans 3:22 — the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:

The first thing verse 22 does is confirm what we just said about the righteousness of God in verse 21. The righteousness manifested by God is the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ. This righteousness is not a righteousness through law, but instead is the righteousness through faith in Christ.

Righteousness through law (if such were possible) would be based on something I did — I would have kept the law perfectly. But this righteousness of God is based on something God did — God gave his only begotten Son to die on the cross for me.

And, as we will see, that distinction is at the heart of Paul's entire argument in this letter — righteousness based, not on what I did, but on what God did. And that difference is also the primary distinction between the system of law and the system of faith. One is based on my efforts, while the other is based on God's efforts. Paul frequently discusses this distinction in his other letters.

Ephesians 2:8-9 — For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is **not** your own doing; it is the gift of God, **not** a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Philippians 3:9 — And be found in him, **not** having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, **but** that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Titus 3:5 — He saved us, **not** because of works done by us in righteousness, **but** according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

And so we obtain this righteousness, not through our works, but through our faith. Righteousness through the law would be based on works — it would be a righteousness that was earned. But righteousness through Jesus is based on faith — it is a gift from God given to those who trust and rely on God, which (as we have already seen) requires an obedient faith. If I am disobeying God, then I am certainly not trusting and relying on God. Faith in God requires faithfulness to God.

“But baptism is a work!” We hear that a lot, but it is not true, at least not in the way that statement is almost always intended. Yes, baptism is something that we do (or, more precisely, something that is done to

us), but I have never met anyone who, after their baptism, looked up to God and said, “now you owe me!” We do not earn our salvation when we are baptized. No one who reads the Bible could ever think such a thing. And, even after being a member of the Lord’s church for over half a century, I have never met anyone in the church who has that attitude about their baptism. “I did it, so now you owe me! Pay up!”

And Paul certainly did not view baptism that way. Paul knew that baptism is essential for salvation, and that baptism is, in fact, the precise point at which our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16). But Paul also knew that baptism is not some meritorious work by which we earn our salvation. Didn’t we just read that verse from Paul’s pen a moment ago?

Titus 3:5 — He saved us, **not because of works** done by us in righteousness, **but** according to his own mercy, **by the washing of regeneration** and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

I think we can paraphrase that verse from Titus 3 this way: “He saved us, not by works, but by baptism!” Isn’t that what Paul is saying in Titus 3:5? What is “the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” if it is not baptism? Doesn’t it sound just like Peter’s command in Acts 2?

Acts 2:38 — Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Paul will have much more to say on the subject of baptism when we get to Romans 6, but for now, let’s get back to our question about verse

22 — for whom was this righteousness of God manifested? Just the Jews? Just the Gentiles? Maybe different plans for each?

Let's listen as Paul answers that question: "The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ **for all who believe. For there is no distinction.**"

- Just the Jews or just the Gentiles? No, Paul says. It is for **all** who believe.
- Different plans for each? No, Paul says. There is **no distinction.**

Just as the Jews and the Gentiles are in the same boat when it comes to the problem of sin, so the Jews and the Gentiles are in the same boat when it comes to the solution to the problem of sin. And that makes perfect sense. If the problem is the same, then wouldn't we expect the solution to also be the same?

"There is no distinction." Let's keep that fact in mind as we get closer and closer to Romans 9-11. Why? Because many people think that they see a distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles with regard to salvation in Romans 9-11. But we know they must be wrong. Why? Because we just read Romans 3:22 — "there is no distinction." It is not possible to find a distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles with regard to their salvation if there is no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles with regard to their salvation — and verse 22 says there is no distinction.

And why is it again that we need this other path to righteousness? What again is the problem with using the law as a path to righteousness? Paul has already answered both of those questions, but he an-

swers them again in the next verse, which is one of the most quoted verses in the entire letter of Romans.

Romans 3:23

Romans 3:23 — for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

While verse 23 is certainly a famous verse, I think we have already said just about all we need to say about it. We could, for example, just repeat what we said earlier about verse 9, which earlier made the same point that we see here in verse 23 — “for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.”

And so, what Paul is saying here in verse 23 is the same thing he told us before. In fact, it is the same thing Paul proved before by his description of the Gentiles, by his description of the Jews, and by the many Old Testament verses he quoted in those descriptions.

But why? Why does Paul say it again here? We know one possible reason. It is the same reason why we sometimes repeat ourselves — we do it for emphasis.

But I think another reason why Paul repeats himself here is that verse 23 ties this new section back to the previous section of his letter. Verse 23 is the problem, and Paul is now describing the solution to that problem. And so Paul reminds us here of the problem. That problem is the link between the previous section and this new section.

And so there is not much left for us to say about verse 23, but before we move on, let's ask a question that sometimes comes up with verses in the Bible such as verse 23, and that question is this: **does "all" mean "all"?** Verse 23 says that **"all** have sinned." Does that include children?

Earlier we looked at what Calvin had to say about "elect infants." Are babies born with some taint of sin by which it would make sense to describe babies as sinners? Is that what Paul is doing here when he uses the word "all"? "All have sinned." No, it is not.

Although we sometimes say that "all" means "all," that is not what the Bible says. The Bible says that sometimes "all" does not mean "all." The Bible says that sometimes the word "all" excludes obvious exceptions. Let's look at an example.

Psalm 8:6 — You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put **all** things under his feet.

That Psalm is a Messianic Psalm, and one of the Messianic prophecies in that Messianic Psalm is that God would put **"all things"** under the feet of the Messiah. "All things."

Now, let me ask a question — does "all" mean "all" in Psalm 8:6? Did God the Father place even himself under the feet of the Messiah? We don't have to wonder about the answer to that question because Paul quotes Psalm 8:6 and then answers that question for us.

1 Corinthians 15:27 — For "God has put **all** things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "**all** things are put in subjection," **it is plain that he is excepted** who put **all** things in subjection under him.

“It is plain that he is excepted.” In other words, “all” does not always mean “all.” Instead, sometimes there are plain obvious exceptions that must be excluded, such as we are told by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:27 about Psalm 8:6.

Can we think of another example? Yes, we can.

Hebrews 9:27 — And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.

Is that **all** men? Do we **all** have an appointment with death? Will we **all** die? We often say that, looking to Hebrews 9:27 for support — but once again there is a plain and obvious exception. Those who are living when Jesus returns will not experience death. Paul describes that plain exception in another of his letters.

1 Corinthians 15:51 — Behold! I tell you a mystery. **We shall not all sleep**, but we shall all be changed.

And so, yes, we can say that all men have an appointment with death, and we can say that God has placed all things under the feet of the Messiah — but both of those statements have plain and obvious exceptions that can go unsaid and most often do go unsaid.

What about here? “All have sinned.” Are there any plain and obvious exceptions to that statement? Yes — that statement obviously excludes infants. It is impossible for a baby to sin. Babies are a plain exception to the statement that “all have sinned.” Babies have never sinned.

We could look at many verses to prove that point, such as God’s description of children as having “no knowledge of good or evil” in Deuteronomy 1:39. But perhaps the easiest way to prove the point is

just to listen to Jesus describe what we must all be like to enter the kingdom of God:

Luke 18:15-17 — Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, **for to such belongs the kingdom of God**. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God **like a child** shall not enter it.”

When we are born again and our sins are washed away in the watery grave of baptism, then we become like a child. That is what happens with any birth — it produces a child. “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God **like a child** shall not enter it.”

So perhaps here is the best way to say it: **all means all, except when it doesn't!** It usually does — but not always. And the way to figure out when it doesn't is to open the word of God and read all that the Bible has to say on the subject.

Romans 3:24

Romans 3:24 — and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

Verse 24 **might** be additional evidence that “all” does not mean “all” in verse 23. Why? Because of the word “and” at the beginning of verse 24. “All have sinned ... **and** are justified by his grace as a gift.”

When we look at verses 23 and 24 together, it **might** seem as if Paul is talking about all who sin **and** who are then saved from that sin by the

grace of God. If that view is correct, then the “all” in verse 23 must exclude those sinners who have rejected the gift of God’s grace.

But is that what is going on in verses 23-24? I don’t think so, even though it might look that way to some in the English translation.

First, let’s look more closely at the grammar. The phrase “and are justified” in the ESV translates a Greek present passive participle. There is no “and” in the Greek text. The most natural way to read verse 24 is that it simply describes the manner in which justification occurs. “All have sinned, and, if they are justified, then this is how that will happen.”

Second, let’s remember how we got to verse 23. Paul spent most of three chapters proving that the problem of sin is **universal**. And, as we said, I think the best way to view verse 23 is simply as a restatement of that truth about sin — it is a **universal** problem. I do not think that Paul has suddenly narrowed the scope of that universal problem in verse 23 despite what the English translation of verse 24 might suggest to some.

Third, let’s back up and remember what we saw in verse 22 — “for all who believe.” That universal solution in verse 22 corresponds to the universal problem in verse 23.

So, no, I do not think that we should limit the sinners in verse 23 to only those sinners who later obey the gospel and are justified by the grace of God.

Our next question is this: how does that justification work? Paul tells us right here: we are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. What does that mean?

Let's start with the word "gift." The English word "gift" appears 10 times in the ESV translation of Romans, with the plural "gifts" appearing two more times. This verse is the second appearance of the word. (We saw the same word earlier in Romans 1:11 when Paul said he longed to come in person so he could impart some spiritual **gift** to strengthen them.) In six of the 12 appearances of "gift" or "gifts" in Romans, we find the phrase "free gift." And five of the 12 appearances of the word "gift" are found in a single passage — Romans 5:15-17.

That is what is going on in the English translation, but what is going on in the original Greek text? As it turns out, quite a lot! We find six different Greek words for "gift" from two different word families.

- First, we have the Greek noun *charis* (Strong's #5485). That word appears 24 times in Romans, where it is translated "grace" 21 times. But in Romans 4:4 that same word is translated "gift." (It is twice translated "thanks.")
- Second, we have the Greek noun *charisma* (Strong's #5486). That word appears six times in Romans, where it is translated "gift" once (1:11), "free gift" three times (5:15; 5:16; 6:23), and plural "gifts" twice (11:29; 12:6).
- Third, we have the Greek adverb *dorean* (Strong's #1432). That word appears only once in Romans (our current verse, 3:24), where it is translated "gift."
- Fourth, we have the Greek noun *dorea* (Strong's #1431). That word appears twice in Romans (5:15; 5:17), where it is translated "free gift."

- Fifth, we have the Greek noun *dorema* (Strong's #1434). That word appears only once in Romans (5:16), where it is translated "free gift."
- Finally, we have the Greek verb *prodidomi* (Strong's #4272). That word also appears only once in Romans (11:35), where it is translated "given a gift."

And what can we say about that list of Greek words for "gift"? One thing we can say is that there is a lot more going on in the Greek text than meets the eye in the English translation.

For example, the phrase "free gift" is found six times in Romans, but in the Greek text behind that one English phrase we find three different Greek words from two different word families — all translated "free gift."

And I think we can say much more than that, but we will save that discussion until we get to those later verses that also use the word "gift." For now, let's just put that word "gift" on our list of key words in the book of Romans so we can be on the lookout for it each time it appears.

And let's now focus on the appearance of that word here in Romans 3:24 — "justified by his grace as a **gift**." As we said a moment ago, the Greek word translated "gift" here is the Greek word *dorean* (Strong's #1432).

Dorean is an adverb that means freely, gratuitously, for nothing, or as a gift. And that Greek adverb carries an interesting double meaning.

It can mean “freely” in the positive sense (as without charge) or in the negative sense (as without result or in vain).

Paul uses the word both ways. Here in verse 24, the word is used in the positive sense, but in Galatians 2:21 Paul uses the same Greek word in the negative sense — “or if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for **no purpose**.” That is the same adverb we find here in verse 24, but in the opposite sense.

As we just saw, the word “gift” in Romans comes from two different Greek word families. And, as it turns out, we find both of those word families right here in verse 24 — “justified by his **grace** as a **gift**.”

Grace is the Greek word *charis*, which of course is another key word in Romans. That Greek word is usually translated “grace” as we see right here, but in Romans 4:4 the same Greek word is translated “gift.” If the ESV had also done that right here, then we would have the phrase “justified by his gift as a gift!”

With this short phrase “grace as a gift,” Paul is giving us a preview of coming attractions! And I think one of those coming attractions is the same thing Paul tells us elsewhere:

2 Corinthians 9:15 — Thanks be to God for his **inexpressible gift!**

That verse has something in common with Romans 3:24 — they both include the same two word families we have been looking at. Here, in verse 24, Paul says “grace (*charis*) as a gift (*dorean*),” while in 2 Corinthians 9:15, Paul says “thanks (*charis*) be to God for his inexpressible gift (*dorea*).”

But Paul also includes another word in 2 Corinthians 9:15 to describe that gift — this gift is not just a gift, but this gift is an “inexpressible” gift. And what that word means is that we can never completely describe this gift from God. We could talk about it all our lives, and still there would be much more to say about it. The subject is inexhaustible.

I think what we will find is that Paul is making that same point in Romans without using that same word “inexpressible.” I think what we will find as we work our way through this letter to the Romans is that Paul looks at this gift of grace from many different angles and in many different ways.

Why? Because this gift of grace is inexpressible — it is inexhaustible — it is impossible for us to completely describe. All we can do is look at it with wonder and with thankfulness — which is what Paul does all throughout Romans. Yes, we will learn a great deal in this letter about this gift of grace, but we can never say we know all there is to know about it. Not even Paul could say that!

The Greek word used here for “gift” refers to a gift that is freely given. This gift is not an earned gift. This gift is not some sort of gift that we are owed because of something we have done. This is not the sort of “gift” we often see today where we are promised a “free gift” after we make some sort of purchase. That sort of gift is not a free gift even though that is what it is often called!

There is no *quid pro quo* when it comes to a gift freely given — no this for that. In legal terms, there is no consideration for a gift freely given. If I can sue someone who fails to give me my promised free gift, then that gift is most certainly not a free gift!

But, unlike those earthly gifts, this gift of grace from God **is** a free gift. It is a gift that is freely given. It is not a gift that God owes us. It is not a gift that we have earned. It is not something we can demand. It is a gift freely given by God.