

Saved: God's Plan of Salvation

Week 1: Our Need for Salvation: Sin and Grace -- Romans 3:21–26; Romans 6:23

Picture a courtroom, hushed and full. The gallery is packed with people of every kind, the respectable and the ruined, the religious and the reckless, and to their quiet surprise they are not in the gallery at all. They are in the dock. One by one the record is read, and there is no arguing with it. The proud and the humble, the churchgoer and the outsider, the person who kept most of the rules and the person who broke them all, every last one of them hears the same verdict settle over the room like dusk. Guilty. Not guilty of the same things, and not to the same degree, but guilty all the same. "There is no distinction," the prosecutor says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." And for a long moment it seems the story can only end one way.

This is where the apostle Paul begins, and he begins here on purpose. Before he will say one word about rescue, he insists that we feel the weight of the trouble we are in. Sin is not a small thing, a stumble, an awkward habit we will outgrow. It is a debt we cannot pay and a distance we cannot close. "The wages of sin is death," he writes, and he means it plainly. Left to ourselves, with our best efforts and our finest record, we come up short of the glory of God, and the shortfall is fatal. We do not like to hear this. We would rather grade ourselves on a curve and compare ourselves to someone worse. But the gospel will not let us. It tells the truth about us first, because only people who know they are lost go looking to be found.

And then, into that silent courtroom, two of the most beautiful words in all of Scripture: "But now." But now a righteousness from God has been revealed, apart from anything we could earn or achieve. God Himself has done what the law could never do. He put His own Son forward as the place where mercy and justice meet, a propitiation by His blood, so that He could be both just and the One who declares the guilty righteous. The gavel that should have fallen on us fell on Christ instead. What we could never buy, God offers as a gift. "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." The debt is not ignored. It is paid.

So this study, and this whole journey through God's plan of salvation, begins at the foot of a cross. Not with a list of religious chores, and not with a pep talk about trying harder, but with an honest look at our need and an even more honest look at God's grace. You may have carried a quiet shame for years, or you may have hidden behind a tidy life that looks fine from the outside. Either way, the same word is for you. You are more sinful than you dared admit, and you are more loved than you ever dreamed. Read these verses slowly. Let them tell you the truth about yourself, and then let them tell you the truth about your God.

Group Discussion: Paul says there is "no distinction" because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (vv. 22–23). Why do people find it so hard to admit they are sinners, and what

are some of the ways our culture tries to soften, rename, or explain away the reality of sin? How does facing the truth about our need actually open the door to grace rather than close it?

Personal Reflection: Think honestly about how you tend to measure yourself before God. Do you lean toward comparing yourself with people who seem worse, or toward a quiet anxiety that you can never quite do enough? What would change in your heart this week if you truly believed that your standing with God rests on His grace as a gift and not on your performance?

Read Romans 3:21–26; Romans 6:23

Study Questions

1. Paul writes that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (v. 23). What does it mean to “fall short of the glory of God,” and why does Paul insist there is “no distinction” between people on this point? What does this teach us about the true nature and reach of sin?
2. Sin is easy to see in the headlines and hard to see in the mirror. Where in your own life are you most tempted to excuse, rename, or downplay sin, treating it as a personality quirk or someone else’s fault rather than as something that separates you from God?
3. Paul says the righteousness of God has been revealed “apart from the law” (v. 21), even though the Law and the Prophets bore witness to it. Why could keeping the law never make a person right with God, and what does it mean that this righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ?
4. Most of us have a private list of things we do to feel acceptable, whether religious activity, moral effort, or being useful to others. What is on your list? What might it look like this week to stop offering God your résumé and start receiving His righteousness as a gift?
5. Paul says we “are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (v. 24). What do the words “justified,” “grace,” and “redemption” each tell us about what God has done for us, and why does it matter that all of this is called a gift?
6. A gift can only be received, never earned, and that is surprisingly hard for proud hearts to accept. In what area of life do you find it most difficult to simply receive grace rather than try to deserve it? What does your resistance reveal about what you still believe you must prove?
7. Paul says God “put forward” Christ “as a propitiation by his blood” so that He might be “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (vv. 25–26). How does the cross allow God to forgive sin without simply ignoring it, and what does this reveal about both His justice and His love?
8. Stand for a moment at the cross and consider that your sin helped put Him there, and His love kept Him there. How does seeing both the cost of your sin and the depth of His mercy at the same time change the way you think about yourself, and the way you respond to God?
9. Romans 6:23 sets two destinies side by side: “the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Why does Paul call death a wage but eternal life

a gift, and how does this verse help us hold together two truths that some try to separate, that salvation can never be earned, yet must be received through a faith that trusts and obeys the Lord Jesus?

10. Look back over these verses as a whole. They begin with our deep need and end with God's free gift in Christ. Name one specific way Jesus is using this truth to form you right now. Where is He inviting you to lay down your pride, receive His grace, and begin to walk as someone who has been rescued?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 53:4–6, the Servant who bore our iniquities so that we could be healed; Romans 5:6–11, while we were still sinners Christ died for us; Ephesians 2:1–9, made alive by grace when we were dead in our sins; Titus 3:3–7, saved not by works of righteousness but according to His mercy; 1 Timothy 1:15–16, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.