

# Rooted: Core Truths

## Week 3: The Problem of Sin and God's Solution -- Romans 3:21–26

Almost everyone carries a private list. It is the collection of things we hope no one ever discovers: the word we said that we cannot take back, the relationship we damaged, the habit we cannot seem to break, the version of ourselves that comes out when we are tired or cornered or sure that no one is watching. We are experts at keeping the list hidden. We curate the version of ourselves that other people see, and most of the time it works. But there are moments, often around three in the morning, when the curating stops and the list rises to the surface, and we lie there with the quiet, heavy knowledge that something in us is not right and we cannot fix it ourselves.

Paul has been building toward this moment for three chapters. He has walked through the religious and the irreligious, the moral and the immoral, and concluded that every mouth is stopped and the whole world stands accountable before God. “None is righteous, no, not one.” “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” It is the most thorough diagnosis ever written, and it leaves no one out, including us. And then, just when the courtroom has gone silent and there is nothing left to say in our own defense, Paul writes two of the most beautiful words in all of Scripture: “But now.” “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law.” God has done something we could never do. He has provided, in the blood of His own Son, a way for guilty people to be declared righteous, freely, by His grace.

We tend to escape the problem of sin in one of two directions. Some of us minimize it. We compare ourselves to people who seem worse, we rename our sins as mistakes or struggles or personality quirks, and we assure ourselves that we are basically good. Others of us drown in it. We know exactly what we have done, and we carry it like a stone, certain that we are beyond the reach of grace. Romans 3 refuses both escapes. It tells the minimizer that his sin is far more serious than he thinks, and it tells the despairing one that God's grace is far greater than she dares to hope. There is a way to be both fully honest about our sin and fully free from its guilt, and that way runs straight through the cross.

That is where this week takes us, into the hardest truth and the best news in the world. Read these verses slowly. Let Paul show you the depth of the problem so that you can feel the height of the solution, and let the God who is both “just and the justifier” do for you what you could never do for yourself.

**Group Discussion:** People today have many ways of dealing with the sense that something is wrong with us: some deny that sin is real, some redefine it so it no longer applies to them, some try to outweigh it with good deeds, and some simply numb the guilt. Why do you think the reality of sin is so hard for people to face honestly? What does our culture tend to offer instead of the forgiveness Paul describes?

**Personal Reflection:** Think about what you actually do with your own guilt. When you know you have sinned, where do you tend to go: hiding it, explaining it away, beating yourself up, or pretending it does not matter? How might honestly facing your sin and receiving God's grace change the way you carry it?

*Read Romans 3:21–26*

## Study Questions

1. Paul concludes that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (v. 23), summing up the case he has built since chapter 1. What does it mean that every person, without exception, has sinned, and why is it so important to grasp the seriousness and universality of sin before we can understand the solution?
2. It is easy to admit that people in general are sinners while quietly believing we are not really that bad. In what ways do you minimize, rename, or excuse your own sin, perhaps by comparing yourself to others? What would it look like to be as honest about your sin as Paul is about ours?
3. Paul says the righteousness of God has now been revealed “apart from the law,” though “the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it” (v. 21). Why could the law never make a person right with God, and what is this righteousness from God that comes through Jesus Christ instead?
4. Many of us, even after coming to Christ, still try to earn God's acceptance by our performance, feeling close to Him on our good days and far from Him on our bad ones. Where are you still trying to earn a standing with God that He offers as a gift? How would resting in grace change your walk with Him?
5. Paul says we “are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (v. 24). What does it mean to be “justified,” why does Paul insist it is “as a gift,” and what has the “redemption that is in Christ Jesus” cost?
6. To be justified by grace as a gift means our forgiveness was free to us but infinitely costly to God. Do you live like a person who has been freely and fully forgiven, or do you still carry guilt God has already lifted? What would change this week if you truly received your forgiveness as the gift it is?
7. Paul says God “put forward (Christ) as a propitiation by his blood” (v. 25). What does it mean that the cross turned aside the wrath our sin deserved, and how does the death of Jesus show both the seriousness of sin and the depth of God's love at the same time?
8. Stand at the cross for a moment and consider what your sin cost. When you think honestly about the price the Son of God paid for your forgiveness, what stirs in you, and how should the cross shape the way you treat sin, and the way you treat the people Christ also died for?
9. Paul says this righteousness is “received by faith” and that God is “the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (vv. 25–26), and elsewhere that we are “justified by faith apart from works of the law” (v. 28). This is the passage most often used to teach salvation by faith alone. What does Paul mean by faith here, what are the “works of the law” he excludes, and

how does the rest of the New Testament show that saving faith lays hold of God's gift through repentance, confession, and baptism, rather than standing alone?

10. Look back across the passage. Paul has shown you the full weight of your sin, the free gift of God's righteousness, the costly redemption in Christ, and a God who is both just and the justifier of those who come to Him in faith. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Romans 3:21–26 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

### **Now or Later**

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 53:4–6, the servant who was pierced for our transgressions and bore our iniquities; Acts 2:36–41, the crowd cut to the heart, told to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins; Romans 5:1–11, peace with God and reconciliation through the blood of Christ; Ephesians 2:1–10, saved by grace through faith, not by works, and created for good works; James 2:14–24, the faith that justifies is never alone but shows itself in obedience