

Facilitator Notes for *Set Free!* – A Study in Romans
Lesson 5 – Now for the Good News . . . – Romans 3:9-31

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.
HEARING GOD FOR YOURSELF IS WAY BETTER THAN MY COMMENTS!**

Questions

Read **Romans 3: 9-20**.

Paul comes to the end of his lengthy argument about human sinfulness that he started in **Romans 1:18** and has continued into **Romans 3** (Lessons 2-4). He begins to wrap up his "case" by asking, "What shall we conclude then?"

1. According to **3:9**, how are Jews and Gentiles alike? **Both are under sin or under the power of sin**
2. What is Paul implying about **us** and **sin** when he says that all are "*under*" sin? (Also see **Galatians 3:22**.) The term "*under sin*" personifies sin, giving it the personality of a cruel tyrant or jailer that holds the human race imprisoned in guilt and under judgment. "*Under sin*" gives the impression that sin is over us, weighing us down, crushing us. We are under the power and control of sin, not the other way around.

"Under sin" may not be the way we see ourselves or others, but it is God's view of us and our world. We are prisoners that cannot break free from that which holds us captive. We are under its power. Paul is depicting sin as broken-ness, fallen-ness, and spiritual lost-ness. Sin is not just an act of wrong-doing; sin is a power with a life of it's own. Because we are under sin, we are not free. Sin is an external power that enslaves humanity (**Romans 6:16**) and all creation (**Romans 8:21**). Sin is not an occasional slip or mistake, but a personal collaboration with a supernatural power (**Eph 2:1-2**) which overshadows and tragically infects the world.

- ♥ What evidence do you see that humanity and our world is "*under*" sin?
- ♥ Does "*Jews and Gentiles alike are under sin*" mean all are as bad as they can be? Why or why not? Sin and moral corruption (sometimes referred to as "*total depravity*") does not mean that we are as bad or depraved (corrupted) as we possibly could be. Such an idea is contradicted by our every day observations of people. Not all persons are drunkards, felons, adulterers or murderers! There are many "*good*" people who do "*good*" things! Rather, complete sinfulness or total depravity means that **no part of us is untouched by sin**. The term refers to the **extent** of the sin (twisting and tainting every part of our humanness), **not** the **degree** (insinuating that every part of us is as bad as it can be). We might express it this way: No one is as bad as he or she might be, but on the other hand, no action of ours is as good as it should be! Sin so permeates us that there is not a part of us left **untouched** by sin.

- ♥ How would you explain the difference between these two statements: *We sin because we are sinners* and *We are sinners because we sin*. Are both these statements true? Why or why not?

This is a little like asking what came first: the chicken or the egg? Both statements are true. Sin carries two paradoxical tensions: people sin **willingly**, but **inevitably**. Sin is freely chosen (otherwise it would not be sin) but there is a "*gravitational pull*" to sin, a domination against which humanity is powerless to stand up to. **We are NOT FREE to NOT sin**.

3. To prove his point that all are *under sin*, Paul quotes from the Old Testament scriptures. In **3:10-12**, how many times, using what phrases, does Paul get across the point that all people are sinners? At least six times using phrases like: "There is **no one** righteous, **not even one**; there is **no one** who understands, **no one** who seeks God. **All** have turned away; there is **no one** who does good, **not even one**."

- ♥ Why do you think Paul makes such a big deal (making his case over and over) that all are sinners and there is no one who is righteous before God?

If we don't see our condition, we will never accept the cure!

4. List all the *body parts* you see in the quotations from the Old Testament (3:13-18).

Throats, tongues, lips, mouths, feet, eyes

What point is Paul making by skillfully piecing together these particular Old Testament scriptures that included different parts of the body?

Paul is showing us the pervasiveness of sin. Sin effects our physical bodies as well as our mind, emotions, heart (soul) and will.

♥ How do the quotations in 3:13-18 concur with Jesus' words in Mark 7:18-23?

Our sinfulness is pervasive and comes from within our hearts

♥ How do you think God intended us to use each of the body parts that are mentioned in 3:13-18?

Our bodies were given to us to love and serve God and others which brings glory to God

♥ Can you think of some reasons why Paul chooses to "prove his point" by quoting from the Old Testament and why he uses so many different quotations from scripture?

The Old Testament (the Torah and Prophets) was the only "Bible" of the time – the Christ-followers (both Jews and Gentiles) in Rome read, studied and followed the OT scriptures. Paul was writing a letter to these Christ-followers, (his letter was not considered Scripture at the time as it is today) and he wanted to build a strong case for what he was teaching them. The Christian Jews, especially, would be very familiar with the what we call the Old Testament. They considered the scripture that Paul was quoting as the very words of God, which carried great power and authority. By quoting from scripture, Paul was showing that he was not just making something up; this is God's verdict, not just Paul's opinion. The number of quotes shows that he isn't using some obscure verse to prove his point and it also demonstrates that sin is not a new problem.

5. What does God's law reveal about humanity (3:19)? (See definition of "law" in Lesson 3.)

God's law defines what is right and wrong and compared to God's law, we all are with out excuses or self-defense because no one always does what is right and always avoids what is wrong. God's law is based on God's perfect, good, and holy character and it reflects what God created humans to be. God's law makes us accountable to God for our behavior because he is our Creator.

♥ How does God's law silence us or keep us from having excuses (3:19)?

♥ For **what** are we accountable to God (3:19 NIV)? **Why** are we accountable to God?

6. According to 3:20, what are two things we learn when we try to keep God's law?

We learn that we can't keep it (and therefore can't become righteous) and through the law we learn what sin is. The purpose of the law is not to save us, but to make us aware of sin and our need for salvation.

How does trying to keep God's law help us realize these facts?

If we try to follow God's rules, we quickly become aware that we can't keep the rules perfectly. This reveals our sin – and if it wasn't for the law, we wouldn't even know what sin is. We would think that our behavior and attitudes were normal and okay. The law shows us where we do wrong, but it doesn't enable us to do right!

♥ What are some things you often find yourself doing to try and gain God's favor through performance?

♥ In 3:19-20, Paul brings his case of "proving" all people are sinners to a close. If Romans 1:18-3:20 were a court room drama and you were on the jury, would you say that Paul has proven his case beyond a reasonable doubt? Why or why not?

Read Romans 3:21-26 in both the NIV and NLT versions.

♥ Considering the message so far in Romans, describe your reaction to what you read in 3:21-26?

Romans 2:21-26 has been called by some Bible scholars "possibly the most important single paragraph ever written." In these verses, we are introduced to several *theological terms* whose meanings need to be understood in order for us to grasp the full significance of the *Gospel* – the *Good News* of Jesus Christ. Even though we will continue to define and unpack these terms as we work through *Romans*, we can begin to understand these concepts now by doing something as simple as comparing two *versions* or *translations* of the Bible. This is often a great way to begin examining and exploring a portion of scripture.

7. Define the terms or phrases listed below, found in the NIV translation, by writing how these terms and phrases are translated in the NLT version.

Verse	NIV Phrase or Word	NLT Version
3:21	<i>righteousness</i> from God	being (made) right in God's sight
3:22	<i>faith</i> in Jesus Christ	when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins
3:23	fall short of the <i>glory of God</i>	fall short of God's glorious standard
3:24	<i>justified</i>	declared us not guilty
3:24	<i>grace</i>	gracious kindness
3:24	<i>redemption</i>	<u>freed us</u> by taking away our sins
3:25	<i>sacrifice of atonement</i>	take the punishment for our sins and satisfy God's anger against sin
3:25	<i>faith in his blood</i>	we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us

- ♥ Discuss in your small group *if* and *how* you found this exercise helpful.
- ♥ If other translations of the Bible are available, check to see how these phrases are translated in them.

Justification (3:24, 26) is a legal term belonging to courts of law. It is the opposite of *condemnation*, but different from being *forgiven* or *pardoned*. *Pardon* is negative, meaning the suspension of a penalty or debt. *Justification* is positive, meaning the **granting of a righteous status**. *Pardon* carries the idea of, "You may **go**; you have been freed from the penalty which your sins deserve. *Justification* carries the idea of, "You may **come**; you are welcome to all my love and presence." *Justification* is a gift from God that says punishment cannot be justly inflicted. *Justification* is not our movement toward God (religion), but his movement towards us (grace).

8. Even though we are sinners deserving of God's judgment, according to 3:24-25a, how can we be *justified* (granted a righteous status before God)?

We can be justified (pronounced not guilty and righteous) because of God's grace (gracious kindness; free and undeserved favor) and through the **redemption** that came when Jesus died for us (in our place) and became a **sacrifice of atonement**, taking the punishment for our sins, satisfying God's wrath against sin. (See definition of God's wrath in Lesson 2.)

Redemption – In the OT, this was a term used of slaves who were purchased in order to be set free. Jesus bought our freedom with his death and sets us free from the slavery of sin. His blood (his life) was the ransom price.

♥ What is the *source*, the *basis* and the *means* of **justification** (3:24-25a)?

The source of **justification** (righteous favor in God's sight) is God's **grace**; the basis of justification is the **cross** (Jesus' death) and the means if **faith**, apart from works (our earning it).

No other religion proclaims a free forgiveness and a new life to those who have done nothing to deserve it, but rather, have done a lot to deserve judgment instead. The gospel is the good news of God's grace and God's Son who died our death and bore our judgment. There is nothing else for us to do or even contribute. **Faith's** only function is to **receive** what **grace** offers.

- ♥ Do you think people are more likely to turn to God out of fear of the consequences of sin or out of love for God? Why? When did you first become aware of your own sinfulness and your need for God? What motivated you to turn to God?
- ♥ In his letter, Paul does not introduce *grace*, *justification* and *redemption* until he thoroughly discusses our sinful nature and God's judgment. How does having a greater appreciation for your sin give you a greater appreciation for God's gift of righteousness?

9. How does providing Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for our sins demonstrate the justice of God (3:25-26)? Sin has consequences that demand justice. Sinful behavior hurts God, others and ourselves. God cannot just overlook sin and still remain just and fair. In order for justice to be done, someone must pay the consequences. When Jesus died in our place, he paid the consequences of our sin – thus satisfying the demands of justice.

(How would you feel if someone committed a terrible sin against you (murdering a family member, for example), but God simply let the sinner off the hook because he "loves everyone." This is not justice and letting sin go without restitution would make God unfair and unjust.)

- ♥ Why doesn't God simply declare people righteous without the need for Jesus to be put to death?
- ♥ Why would God offer his righteousness free to every person? Because of his love and gracious kindness for every person he created. Sin separates us from God and Father God desperately wants to be **with us** (in relationship). He made the ultimate sacrifice just so we could be reconciled with him.
- ♥ What does it mean to believe and put your faith in Jesus Christ (3:25-26)? It means we are trusting (depending on) what Jesus did (dying and paying the penalty for our sins) so that we can be made right with God. (See question 11 below.)
- ♥ Why would some people object to the idea that God has offered his forgiveness and righteousness to every person, even the worst sinners?

Read **Romans 3:27-31**.

10. If you had to pick one verse from 3:27-31 to sum up the whole paragraph, which one would it be? Answers may vary, but **3:28** seems to capture the main thought of this paragraph – we are made right with God through faith (our believing and accepting **what Jesus did for us**) and not works (**what we try to do for God**.)

11. *Faith* (3:27, 28, 30, 31) means to *put your complete trust and confidence in something or someone*. If you are *justified* (made right with God) by *faith*, in what, exactly, are you putting your complete trust and confidence?

Faith is **depending on Jesus** to save us. We **trust** that Jesus **did die to pay the penalty for our sins** and that because of his death, resurrection and his ascension back into heaven – he has the **power to forgive us our sins** and **make us right with God**. We trust that not only does he have the **power** to forgive us and **make us right with God**, but that he **will forgive us** and **make us right with God** if we **ask him to**. When we depend on Jesus for this, we enter a **relationship** with him by **committing our lives to him**, letting him be our **Lord and Master**, instead of being our own master. This is saving faith – the faith Paul is talking about in Romans.

Faith is a decision and a choice that every person must make for themselves and no one else can make it for us. Faith is an intentional decision of the head and heart. It says, "I accept what you did for me, Jesus. I am a sinner and I choose to turn from my sins (repent) and I desire to become your fully-devoted follower and live life your way, not my way.

- ♥ When did you realize that your position before God was not based on works?
- ♥ If it were up to you, would you rather be made right with God by *works* or by *faith*? Why?

12. What similarities do you see between **Romans 3:27-28** and **Ephesians 2:8-9**? Both sets of verses say that we are saved or justified by faith and not by keeping the law or doing good works. We can't boast about earning our way because salvation is a gift from God.

♥ What are we implying if we think we can **earn** our right standing before God through trying to keep God's law instead of accepting God's **gift** of righteousness through **faith** (**Galatians 2:21**)?

We are implying that there was no need for Jesus to die and his death was pointless and unnecessary. If there were any other way for our sins to be forgiven and for us to be set free from the bondage of sin, there would have been no reason for God (Jesus) to be born as a human, live his life as one of us and then be crucified as a sacrifice of atonement for our sins.

13. Read **Romans 3:28** and **31**. How does true faith **uphold** or **fulfill** the law (**Romans 8:3-4; 13:8-10**)? When we have true faith and believe and accept what Jesus did for us, we are set free from the bondage of sin and we are free to live life as God intended. This new life, lived in the power of the Holy Spirit (and not through self-effort) does fulfill all the righteous requirements of God's law. Through or by the Holy Spirit, we are finally able to obey God's law which can be summed up in just two commands: Love God and love others.

Response

If you were a prisoner deserving of the death penalty, what would the word *justification* (**3:24**) mean to you? If you were a slave, what would the word *redemption* (**3:24**) mean to you? Have you accepted these gifts from God by faith? What difference have they made in your life? How will you show your gratitude?

BELOW IS THE SUPPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURE FOR THIS LESSON THAT CAN BE PRINTED OUT FOR SMALL GROUP TIME.

NIV

Galatians 3:22 But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

Mark 7:18 “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him ‘unclean’?”

19 For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods “clean.”)

20 He went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ **21** For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, **22** greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. **23** All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’”

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— **9** not by works, so that no one can boast.

Galatians 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

Romans 8:3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, **4** in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Romans 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. **9** The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” **10** Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

NLT

Galatians 3:22 But the Scriptures have declared that we are all prisoners of sin, so the only way to receive God’s promise is to believe in Jesus Christ.

Mark 7:18 “Don’t you understand either?” he asked. “Can’t you see that what you eat won’t defile you? **19** Food doesn’t come in contact with your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then comes out again.” (By saying this, he showed that every kind of food is acceptable.)

20 And then he added, “It is the thought-life that defiles you. **21** For from within, out of a person’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, **22** adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, eagerness for lustful pleasure, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. **23** All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you and make you unacceptable to God.”

Ephesians 2:8 God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. **9** Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

Galatians 2:21 I am not one of those who treats the grace of God as meaningless. For if we could be saved by keeping the law, then there was no need for Christ to die.

Romans 8:3 The law of Moses could not save us, because of our sinful nature. But God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful. God destroyed sin’s control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. **4** He did this so that the requirement of the law would be fully accomplished for us who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

Romans 13:8 Pay all your debts, except the debt of love for others. You can never finish paying that! If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill all the requirements of God’s law. **9** For the commandments against adultery and murder and stealing and coveting—and any other commandment—are all summed up in this one commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” **10** Love does no wrong to anyone, so love satisfies all of God’s requirements.