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THE LOOKOUT

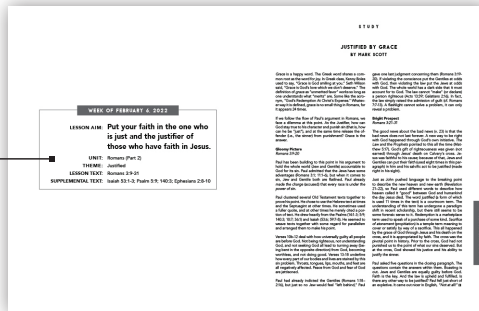
FEBRUARY 2022

Unit: ROMANS (Part 2)
Theme: JUSTIFIED

Overview: To justify something means you make it right—whether it is the margins of a term paper, aligning the front end of a car, or correcting the behavior of an individual. There is no greater book than Romans to discuss being made right with God (justification). Students will learn how they are justified by grace through faith for glory in eternity.

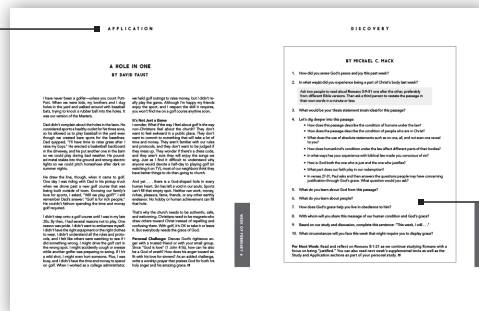
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 6, 2022

LESSON AIM: Put your faith in the one who is just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus.

UNIT: Romans (Part 2)

THEME: Justified

LESSON TEXT: Romans 3:9-31

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Isaiah 53:1-3; Psalm 5:9; 140:3; Ephesians 2:8-10

JUSTIFIED BY GRACE

BY MARK SCOTT

Grace is a happy word. The Greek word shares a common root as the word for joy. In Greek class, Kenny Boles used to say, “Grace is God smiling at you.” Seth Wilson said, “Grace is God’s love which we don’t deserve.” The definition of *grace* as “unmerited favor” works so long as one understands what “merits” are. Some like the acronym, “God’s Redemption At Christ’s Expense.” Whatever way it is defined, grace is no small thing in Romans, for it appears 24 times.

If we follow the flow of Paul’s argument in Romans, we face a dilemma at this point. As the Justifier, how can God stay true to his character and punish sin (that is, how can he be “just”), and at the same time release the offender (i.e., the sinner) from punishment? Grace is the answer.

Gloomy Picture*Romans 3:9-20*

Paul has been building to this point in his argument to hold the whole world (Jew and Gentile) accountable to God for its sin. Paul admitted that the Jews have some advantages (Romans 3:1; 11:1-6), but when it comes to sin, Jew and Gentile both are flatlined. Paul already *made the charge* (accused) that every race is *under the power of sin*.

Paul clustered several Old Testament texts together to prove his point. He chose to use the Hebrew text at times and the Septuagint at other times. He sometimes used a fuller quote, and at other times he merely cited a portion of text. He drew heavily from the Psalms (14:1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; 36:1) and Isaiah (53:6; 59:7-8). He seemed to weave texts together with some regard for parallelism and arranged them to make his point.

Verses 10b-12 deal with how universally guilty all people are before God. Not being righteous, not understanding God, and not seeking God all lead to turning away (being bent in the opposite direction) from God, becoming worthless, and not doing good. Verses 13-18 underline how every part of our bodies and lives are stained by this sin problem. Throats, tongues, lips, mouths, and feet are all negatively affected. Peace from God and fear of God are jettisoned.

Paul had already indicted the Gentiles (Romans 1:18–2:16), but just so no Jew would feel “left behind,” Paul

gave one last judgment concerning them (Romans 3:19–20). If violating the conscience put the Gentiles at odds with God, then violating the law put the Jews at odds with God. The whole world has a dark side that it must account for to God. The law cannot “make” (or declare) a person righteous (Acts 13:39; Galatians 2:16). In fact, the law simply raised the admission of guilt (cf. Romans 7:7-13). A flashlight cannot solve a problem, it can only reveal a problem.

Bright Prospect*Romans 3:21-31*

The good news about the bad news (v. 23) is that the bad news does not last forever. A new way to be right with God happened through God’s own initiative. *The Law and the Prophets* pointed to this all the time (Matthew 5:17). God’s gift of righteousness was given (not earned) through Jesus’ death on Calvary’s cross. Jesus was faithful to his cause; because of that, Jews and Gentiles can put their *faith* (used eight times in this paragraph) in him and his salvific act to be justified (made right in his sight).

Just as John pushed language to the breaking point to describe the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21–22), so Paul used different words to describe how heaven called it “good” between God and humankind the day Jesus died. The word *justified* (a form of which is used 11 times in the text) is a courtroom term. The understanding of this term has undergone a paradigm shift in recent scholarship, but there still seems to be some forensic sense to it. *Redemption* is a marketplace term used to speak of a purchase of some kind. *Sacrifice of atonement* (propitiation) is a temple term meaning to cover or satisfy by way of a sacrifice. This all happened by the grace of God through Jesus and his death on the cross, and it is appropriated by faith. The cross was the pivotal point in history. Prior to the cross, God had not punished us to the point of what our sins deserved. But at the cross, God showed his justice and his ability to justify the sinner.

Paul asked five questions in the closing paragraph. The questions contain the answers within them. Boasting is out. Jews and Gentiles are equally guilty before God. Faith is the key. And the law is upheld and fulfilled. Is there any other way to be justified? Paul fell just short of an expletive. It came out nicer in English, “Not at all!” ■

APPLICATION

A HOLE IN ONE

BY DAVID FAUST

I have never been a golfer—unless you count Putt-Putt. When we were kids, my brothers and I dug holes in the yard and walked around with baseball bats, trying to knock a rubber ball into the holes. It was our version of the Masters.

Dad didn't complain about the holes in the lawn. He considered sports a healthy outlet for his three sons, so he allowed us to play baseball in the yard even though we created bare spots for the baselines. Dad quipped, "I'll have time to raise grass after I raise my boys." He erected a basketball backboard in the driveway, and he put another one in the barn so we could play during bad weather. He pounded metal stakes into the ground and strung electric lights so we could pitch horseshoes after dark on summer nights.

He drew the line, though, when it came to golf. One day I was riding with Dad in his pickup truck when we drove past a new golf course that was being built outside of town. Knowing our family's love for sports, I asked, "Will we play golf?" I still remember Dad's answer: "Golf is for rich people." He couldn't fathom spending the time and money golf required.

I didn't step onto a golf course until I was in my late 20s. By then, I had several reasons not to play. One reason was pride. I didn't want to embarrass myself. I didn't have the right equipment or the right clothes to wear. I didn't understand all the rules and protocols, and I felt like others were watching to see if I did something wrong. I might drive the golf cart in the wrong spot. I might accidentally cough or sneeze while another golfer was preparing to swing. If I hit a wild shot, I might even hurt someone. Plus, I was busy, and I didn't have the time and money to spend

on golf. When I worked as a college administrator, we held golf outings to raise money, but I didn't really play the game. Although I'm happy my friends enjoy the sport, and I respect the skill it requires, you won't find me on a golf course anytime soon.

It's Not Just a Game

I wonder, *What if the way I feel about golf is the way non-Christians feel about the church?* They don't want to feel awkward in a public place. They don't want to commit to something that will take a lot of time and money. They aren't familiar with our rules and protocols, and they don't want to be judged if they mess up. They wonder if there's a dress code, and they aren't sure they will enjoy the songs we sing. Just as I find it difficult to understand why anyone would devote a half-day to playing golf (or watching it on TV), most of our neighbors think they have better things to do than going to church.

And yet . . . there is a God-shaped hole in every human heart. Sin has left a void in our souls. Sports can't fill that empty spot. Neither can work, money, riches, pleasure, fame, friends, or any other earthly endeavor. No hobby or human achievement can fill that hole.

That's why the church needs to be authentic, safe, and welcoming. Christians need to be magnets who draw others toward Christ instead of repelling and confusing them. With golf, it's OK to take it or leave it. But everybody needs the grace of God.

Personal Challenge: Evaluate what outsiders experience when they visit your church gatherings or small group. Do they understand the language and customs you use? Do you see any obstacles that might prevent seekers from encountering God's grace? ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How did you sense God's peace and joy this past week?
2. In what way(s) did you experience being a part of Christ's body last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 3:9-31** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage in their own words in a minute or less.

3. What would be your thesis statement (main idea) for this passage?
4. Let's dig deeper into this passage:
 - How does this passage describe the condition of humans under the law?
 - How does the passage describe the condition of people who are in Christ?
 - What does the use of absolute statements such as *no one*, *all*, and *not even one* reveal to you?
 - How does humankind's condition under the law affect different parts of their bodies?
 - In what ways has your experience with biblical law made you conscious of sin?
 - How is God both the one who is just and the one who justifies?
 - What part does our faith play in our redemption?
 - In verses 27-31, Paul asks and then answers the questions people may have concerning justification through God's grace. What question would you ask?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. How does God's grace help you live in obedience to him?
8. With whom will you share this message of our human condition and God's grace?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What circumstances will you face this week that might require you to display grace?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Romans 5:1-21** as we continue studying Romans with a focus on being "justified." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■