

# Sermon Growth Guide

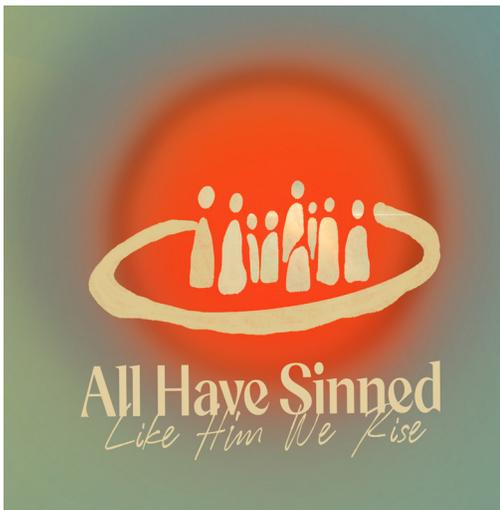
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## All Have Sinned | Romans 3:5-20

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**Key Verse:** “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it.” (Romans 3:21)

**Big Idea:** God does not ignore our sin and He does not lower His standard. Instead, He gives us His righteousness as a gift through faith in Jesus Christ.



### Foundations

For three chapters in Romans, Paul carefully dismantles every illusion of human goodness. Religious people, moral people, and rebellious people alike all stand in the same place: guilty before a holy God. No amount of effort, sincerity, or rule-keeping can repair what sin has broken.

Then comes one of the most important phrases in the Bible: “But now.”

God has done what we could never do. Through Jesus’ sacrificial death, God satisfies His justice and extends His mercy at the same time. On the cross, Jesus becomes our redemption, our propitiation, and our righteousness. We are not saved by trying harder, but by trusting Christ.

This means salvation is not achieved — it is received. Boasting is silenced. Fear is relieved. And faith becomes the open hand that accepts the grace of God!

### Understanding God’s Word

Why is Paul so careful in Romans 1–3 to show that everyone is under sin?

What does it mean that God’s righteousness is revealed “apart from the law?”

Paul says God presented Jesus as a “propitiation.” What problem does that word solve about how a holy God can forgive guilty sinners?

Why does Paul insist that justification is by faith and not by works?

### Applying God’s Word

Where do you most naturally try to “prove” yourself to God — morality, religious activity, knowledge, or comparison with others?

How does justification by faith change the way you handle guilt and shame?

If your standing with God is a gift rather than an achievement, how might that affect your daily joy and peace?

### Witnessing God’s Word

This week, ask God to put one person on your heart who feels either far from God or weighed down by failure. Pray for an opportunity to share the simple message of grace:

“You are not accepted because you are good — you are accepted because Jesus is good!”

Martin Luther said of this passage that it is “the chief point, and the very central place of the entire book of Romans, and of the whole Bible.” Not a small statement! Luther believed that if you understand this paragraph we just read, you understand the gospel. And if you lose this paragraph, you lose Christianity itself! Yikes! I heard another pastor say that if your house was on fire, and you were to rip a page out to keep for yourself, this would be it!

In the 1800s, orchestras across Europe had a serious problem...Every city tuned differently. A violinist could play beautifully in Vienna and then travel to Paris — and suddenly everything sounded wrong. Not because the musicians were unskilled. Not because they didn't care. But because the reference pitch was different.

One orchestra's A was higher. Another's was lower. Singers suffered most — some opera houses tuned so high that sopranos strained their voices just trying to survive the performance. The musicians were sincere. The music was the same, but the standard kept shifting. So in 1859, the French government established a national tuning standard — “diapason normal.” (de-AP-a-zon no-mal). Later the world agreed on what we now know as A 440. And ever since then, before a symphony begins, one instrument stands and plays a single note — the oboe...Concert A.

And here is the rule: The oboe does not adjust to the orchestra. The orchestra adjusts to the oboe. A violinist may feel perfectly in tune... until the true note sounds. And once that pitch fills the room, something uncomfortable happens. Every musician hears it. And it's not so much — “Whoa, someone out there is off key”... but, “Whoa, I am off key!”

Romans 3:23 says “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Really? At this moment, you might be tempted to look sideways and think, “I'm pretty sure I'm better than that guy...”. Or maybe, ladies, “Considering what a mess she's making of things, I'm doing okay!” But here's the thing: God is not comparing us to each other... He's contrasting us to himself:

Psalms 99 puts us in our rightful place. You see God... He is the concert A. And you know what? He can't help himself but be that, and he's really not in the business of compromising that. “God is God...we are not.” The reality is this: when the

Holy God sounds, the idea of comparison just gets obliterated! The entire human race can't help but collapse to ground level. All are sinners.

Some will say, “Well that's not very nice!” But listen — this is not a horizontal statement against your self-esteem. It's a vertical statement that comes after beholding the glory of God!

Proverbs very rightly and plainly states “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Oh, that you and I might have this understanding today. You and I start in a right place when we start with the holiness of God. He is holy.

Scripture tells us humanity was created good — very good. We were made to reflect God's character into the world: So when it came to creation, we were to steward it. When it came to relating to one another, we were to love. When it came to our relationship with God, we were to be in complete harmony with Him. But something happened.

Instead of stewarding creation, we exploited it. Instead of loving, we use. Instead of beholding the God in his holiness, glory and majesty and rightly worshipping Him... we turned away. And today, we're prone to do the very same thing. We even construct smaller gods we can control — We know them well: success, comfort, security, sex, approval... even relevance.

But here's something important to recognize about sin: Sin is not just breaking rules. It is a broken relationship with God that fractures everything else. Sin isn't merely about the actions we take or don't take... sin is the condition we're in. And as Tim said last week in his sermon, “If we're not willing to accept the condition, we won't accept the cure.”

Up to this point in Romans the apostle Paul has been relentless! All throughout the first three chapters we've learned that the immoral are guilty, the moral are guilty, and even the religious are guilty. “No one is or will be declared righteous.”

From Romans 1 through 3, Paul dismantles every excuse we have for believing we're basically okay. Humanity has not merely made mistakes; we have exchanged the glory of God for lesser things and bent our worship toward created things instead of the Creator. Our problem is not just behavior but the heart —even our definitions of good and evil are contorted. By the time Paul finishes, every mouth is silenced and the whole world stands guilty. Why?

God —that True Note—has sounded. And suddenly we find ourselves —not just slightly off—but profoundly and totally out of tune. In response to that, some might say: “Try harder. Get it together. Read the right book. Follow the right system...” (that’s religion, by the way) But Paul says the human problem is not lack of effort...not lack of trying... It is a lack of righteousness. We simply don’t have what it takes. We don’t come wired-up with the right stuff to be righteous on our own. You and I do not simply need better instruction... we need rescue. Why? Because addressing the problem of sin is not about stopping the mistakes, it’s about addressing the condition of the heart. And that kind of help has to come from the outside...

So let me ask: Where is your heart today? Is it longing for something you simply can't provide? That kind of help must come from God Himself.

In April 2010, an oil rig called “Deepwater Horizon” exploded in the Gulf of Mexico. Eleven workers were killed, and what followed became the worst marine oil spill in human history. For 87 straight days, crude oil poured out of the ocean floor — not a surface leak you could see from a passing boat, but a rupture a mile underwater, gushing uncontrollably. An estimated 210 million gallons of oil entered the Gulf.

At first, the damage felt distant. The explosion was offshore. People on land still went to work. Restaurants stayed open. Beach towns functioned as normal. But then the oil began to arrive. Marsh grass turned black. Pelicans were found unable to fly because their wings were glued together. Dolphins washed up dead. Fishing industries shut down. The damage was there for years. But what shocked scientists most was this: The real problem wasn’t only what people could see on the shoreline — it was what they couldn’t see. Massive underwater plumes of oil drifted silently through the Gulf, poisoning habitats far below the surface. The disaster wasn’t just on the beaches. The disaster was in the water itself!

And that is exactly what Paul is saying - Sin is a rupture at the source of the human heart. Things like envy, pride, lust, anger, and selfishness — those are just the “tar balls” on the shore. But beneath them is a deep, continuous spill inside human nature.

What do we do with this kind of problem? If our answer is simply “RELIGION,” - (try harder...do better...follow the right system...do & say the right

things...) we find ourselves like volunteers on the beach - scrubbing rocks, cleaning birds... maybe feeling hopeful for a moment. But the well is still broken a mile down!

What do we do with this kind of problem? If our answer is “THE LAW - Well, the law is like that aerial photo of the disaster site... it shows the severity of the condition and we become conscious of it, which is good... but in the end it leaves us utterly hopeless, powerless to stop it.

What do we do with this kind of problem?

Humanity doesn’t need a cleanup crew. Humanity doesn’t merely need a correct view of how bad the problem is. Humanity needs the well sealed. And that kind of help has to come from the outside...

“But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.” - Romans 3:21 NIV

“But now.” See, you and I - sinners that we are, standing before a perfect and Holy God - we could not possibly produce righteousness on our own, God gave it. God gave the righteousness that we could not come up with.

“This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” - Romans 3:22a

Friends, it’s true. This sermon, as you can plainly read on the screen, is: “All Have Sinned.” True. But now, a righteousness of God has been given to who? All who believe!

“and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” - Romans 3:24 NIV

It’s been bad news up to this point. Are we dealing with bad news here? Or good news? Christianity is not advice about how to clean ourselves up, how to become better people. No. Christianity is news about Holy God who entered the mess himself and permanently sealed the oil break once and for all! And this rescue operation was and is the greatest gift of grace from Him for you and for me and for all!

“All are justified freely.” Did you see that? What’s that mean? Think of this: When people do wrong against us we may forgive them, but that does not declare them righteous. Right? When God justifies. Don’t miss this, friends: God does more

than remove your sin. He brings you into a right relationship with himself! Forgiveness removes condemnation; justification gives righteousness. Forgiveness is something that you and I are always in need of because we are always likely to sin. Justification is a declaration once and for all that God accepts us in his Son. Forgiveness says: "I am not holding this against you." "Your debt is canceled." "You are no longer defined by your failure." Justification says: "Not guilty." "Righteous in My sight." "You stand fully accepted before My throne." Forgiveness says "I choose mercy over wrath." Justification says "The verdict over your life has changed."

What's even more mind-boggling... Look at verse 25:

"God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—Romans 3:25

Jump down to verse 26. Again, why did he do it?

"...he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." Romans 3:26

What does this mean? This is what it means: God doesn't have to stop being just in order to love you. And He doesn't have to stop loving you in order to remain just. It sounds impossible - How does he do it? At the cross. Both happen at the same time. He is just. And He is the one who justifies.

God is just. To say "God is just" means... sin is real, guilt is real, and judgment is deserved. To say "God is just" means... He tells the truth about evil. It means that he will not grade on a curve. It means he doesn't sweep sin under the rug. Think of it: a judge who ignores crime is not loving - he's corrupt! If God simply excused sin, He would deny His own holiness. And he's just not in the business of doing such a thing.

So what does he do? Here's the kicker... He is also the one who justifies. God becomes the justifier by laying his life down on the cross. At the cross, God does not ignore sin - he deals with it personally. He judges it. But He judges it in Christ. Sin is punished - not in you, but in Jesus. In another part of the New Testament, Paul would put it like this:

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." - 2 Corinthians 5:21

What does that mean? It means that God doesn't have to stop being just in order to love you. And He doesn't have to stop loving you in order to remain just. It means that your hope is built on nothing less than His blood and His righteousness!

Grace! 100% grace! You didn't have anything to do with it. It was God's work and God's gift of grace the whole time.

And that's why Paul immediately asks... verse 27:

"Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." - Romans 3 : 27 - 28

Where's boasting? The answer is almost humorous. It's gone! Who could do such a thing! You can't brag about something you didn't accomplish. If salvation were a paycheck, maybe we could compare salaries! But it's not wages... It's a gift. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast."

Jesus, the perfect One - has died for you. He has paid the payment for your sins. And in doing so, God declares you righteous in his sight.

We all come to this table today in the same way: With our hands open - needing mercy... needing grace. Before a Holy God, left to our own righteousness... we'd be ruined. And before a Holy God, if all we have is our striving to be better...we'd never make it. We'd never be good enough. Isn't it great to know - we don't have to be? The only thing required of you is to put your faith in Him.

The law shows us we're out of tune. The law exposes the spill. But it cannot fix either one. Jesus did. Jesus does. And Jesus always will. And that's why this gospel is for ALL.