

STUDY GUIDE 4 – ‘Grasping the solution’

Read **Romans 3:9-26** in the dramatised script and/or in another version. See the Glossary for words that may need explaining.

(1) Why are <i>Jews and Gentiles</i> all in the same boat? (9)	
(2) How many <i>righteous</i> people are there on earth? (10)	
(3) How much is the human race <i>worth</i> in the sight of God? (12)	
(4) When will <i>every mouth be silenced</i> , and for what reason? (19-20)	
(5) How is God’s <i>righteousness</i> given, and to whom? (22)	
(6) What do we <i>fall short of</i> and why? (23)	
(7) What is meant by <i>redemption</i> ? (24)	
(8) What did Christ achieve on the cross? (25)	
(9) At what cost did he achieve this? (25)	
(10) Why is <i>faith</i> needed? (25-26)	
(11) Read Mark 15:6-15 . The story of Barabbas is found in all four Gospels. His release from execution is thanks to Jesus dying instead of him. Discuss how this story sheds light on Paul’s teaching on ‘justification by faith’. <i>Note</i> . The Passover custom of releasing a condemned prisoner may have been a reminder of the Israelites’ escape from the death sentence at the time of the Exodus from Egypt.	
• What did Barabbas deserve and why?	
• What did he get?	
• What did Jesus deserve and why?	
• What did he get?	
• What do we deserve and why?	
• What do we get?	
• What do we have to do to be free?	

(A) Read the dialogue overleaf. ‘New starts and second chances.’ Is God (according to Paul) just offering us a ‘second chance’, or something much more radical?	
(B) Why does Paul go on about <i>faith</i> (vv22, 25, 26)? Flip back to 1:16-17 where he introduces this idea.	
(C) Form three smaller groups and explore the meanings of the three key words <i>righteousness/justification, redemption</i> and <i>atonement</i> . Use the notes and look up the cross-references given there.	
(D) This passage has meant a great deal to people in other ages such as Luther and Wesley (see the introductory notes on the inside of the term’s programme). Does this surprise us? Do we find it too ‘theological’?	
• Is there one point about God (for instance, his mercy) that I have understood in a new or deeper way?	
• Is there one practical step I could take as a result of studying this section of Romans?	
• Is there something in this section which I could turn into praise or prayer to God?	

'A GOOD MORNING AFTER ALL' by Paul Glass

Lamberton and Phipps are Bertie Wooster and Jeeves characters.

- PHIPPS Good morning, sir.
- LAMB Is it, Phipps? Is it really?
- PHIPPS Well, sir. The sun is shining. Flowers are breaking into blossom all around us, and it is unseasonably fine for the time of year. So yes, sir, unless you know otherwise, I would say that it is a good morning.
- LAMB (*Sighs deeply.*) I suppose so, Phipps. If you say it is a good morning, and are prepared to back it up with facts, then who am I to gainsay you?
- PHIPPS I know I am going to regret this question almost immediately, sir, but is there something wrong?
- LAMB Ah, Phipps. You've seen through my clever attempts at disguise.
- PHIPPS Yes sir, you have – as always – cleverly hidden your true feelings.
- LAMB How is it that you know me so well, Phipps?
- PHIPPS I have always fancied myself as something of a student of the human condition, sir. If I may be so bold, what is troubling you?
- LAMB I'm afraid I am a little pensive, Phipps.
- PHIPPS Not still dwelling on your unrequited love for Penelope Fitzhugh McReuteran, I hope?
- LAMB No, no Phipps. Although I still yearn for her with all my heart and soul.
- PHIPPS As you say, sir.
- LAMB No, what causes this furrow in my brow is something else entirely. May I ask you a question, Phipps? You know how I value your sage counsel and advice.
- PHIPPS But of course, sir. I am all ears.
- LAMB Am I a lost cause, Phipps? A hopeless case?
- PHIPPS What do you mean, sir?
- LAMB It's just that as I look back through my life there isn't all that much to be proud of. In fact I've been, let's face it, a bit of a beast.
- PHIPPS Oh, I don't know about that, sir.
- LAMB I do, Phipps, I do. I've been mean to you on more occasions than I care to remember. I've been a bit of a rotter where Auntie Agnes is concerned as well. I'm afraid the old copy-book is well and truly blotted.
- PHIPPS And you think, sir, that the Almighty will be angry with you?
- LAMB Well, he's hardly going to give me a good old pat on the back, is he?
- PHIPPS And you no doubt believe that new starts and second chances are not part of his plan.
- LAMB Well, Phipps. It's just that I've been so thoroughly beastly.
- PHIPPS Sir, it sounds from what you have said that you are sorry for your previous lapses of judgment.
- LAMB Certainly am, Phipps.
- PHIPPS Then you have repented. As I understand it, sir, freedom, a second chance and a fresh start are yours.
- LAMB What, you mean at once?
- PHIPPS Immediately, sir.
- LAMB Gosh, then it may be a good morning after all, a very good morning indeed.

RIGHT THROUGH ROMANS

'Grasping the solution' (3:9-26)

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This passage contains the climax of Paul's argument that has been strengthening like a tidal wave ever since 1:18. The wave rises to its full height at 3:20 in the inevitability of universal judgment, only to break in a cascade of universal grace in 21-26. The words *all* and *none* ring like a tolling bell, firstly bringing us all into condemnation, then releasing us all into life. This is the single message of the Bible, summed up in Isa 53:6: 'We *all*, like sheep, have gone astray, *each of us* has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us *all*.'

3:9-18 Snapshots of human evil (b). **9** *Under the power of sin.* Humanity (whether religious or secular) is like a line of prisoners loaded with chains, completely in the grip of their captor; we all show in our characters the rebel tendencies which are the mark of the Eden serpent. **11** *No-one who seeks God.* The rich diversity of human religious aspiration might seem to disprove this, but ever since Eden ('they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden,' Gen 3:8) we have been running away from God. Yet he consistently seeks us and gives us revelations of himself – which in our pride we then claim as our own insights. **13-17** These examples are confirmed by newspapers, internet or an honest glimpse at our own lives. **18** *No fear of God.* We may claim to love and serve God and others, but what we actually do (as opposed to what we say) shows that we really love and serve ourselves. If we can't see the problem, we may fail to grasp the solution.

3:19-20 Everyone must answer to God (a). **19** *The whole world accountable to God.* 'God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil' (Eccl 12:14). If we think we are the exception, we are in for a shock. **20** *Through the law we become conscious of our sin.* A driving licence is a document that gives us the freedom to use a vehicle on public roads; however, if we misuse that freedom by speeding or parking in the wrong place, the licence becomes a condemning document by recording our offences. So too with God's commandments: if we keep them, they set us free; but if we break them, they lock us up.

3:21-26 God's way of righteousness through Christ (a). Like a peal of bells ringing out the glad tidings of rescue, Paul gives us three key words one after another, each explaining what Christ has done for us on the cross, in restoring our broken relationship with God. (1) **22, 24, 26** *Righteousness (or 'justification')*. We have broken God's law of love and obedience. Thus we are in a wrong relationship with him, and he would be 'just' or right to condemn us. We have *fallen short* of his *glory*, and have no right to enter heaven (v23). But Jesus, who always had a perfect relationship with his Father, has exchanged his rightness for our wrongness (2 Cor 5:21). At the cross God pinned our stained life-record on Jesus, then pinned Jesus' unblemished record on us. He has therefore 'justified' us, not by approving our sin, but by *freely* granting us the righteousness of his own Son. (2) **24** *Redemption.* Paying a price to release a prisoner. Jesus spoke of 'giving his life as a ransom for many' (Mk 10:45). A classic illustration is Aslan in *The Chronicles of Narnia* offering his life for the traitor Edmund. When we sin, we run up a debt against God, and since we can't pay, we become prisoners of sin. Jesus' death paid the full price for our release – as he died he shouted 'It is finished!' (Jn 19:30) which can also mean 'The debt has been paid!' (3) **25** *A sacrifice of atonement.* This would speak volumes to Jews brought up to celebrate the Day of Atonement, on which an animal victim was sacrificed and the sins of the people were carried away by a 'scapegoat' (Lev 16:9-10, 21-22). For Christians it recalls the Last Supper which symbolises Jesus' blood shed for our forgiveness (Mt 26:28). Again, the broken relationship is restored, from God's side. **26** *God's justice.* God is not bending the law, or finding an obscure legal loophole, to get us off paying sin's penalty; he really has exacted the full punishment demanded, by bearing it himself in the person of Jesus Christ. *To be received by faith.* Paul emphasises this (vv22, 25, 26) because a personal transaction is involved. 'Justification' is not automatic or taken for granted; it is to be personally received by the one needing forgiveness. In this sense it refers to individual, active faith in Jesus, as opposed to a general acceptance of Christianity. Faith is taking God at his word and trusting him to give us what he has promised.