

A GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: ROMANS 3:9-31

*All men are sinners in need of the gospel.*

The STORY

Pray with children to start class.

Teaching Points for Class Discussion:

All men, Jews and Gentiles alike, are under sin and condemned by the law. Our sin affects every part of our being. Paul pulls together a string of Old Testament texts here to make his point. The collective whole leaves a convincing argument for the total depravity of man. Paul concludes the argument with a clear statement of the lost condition of all men. No one will be declared righteous in the sight of God by his good works (observing the law). The best the law does for us is to show us our sin and inform us where we have failed.

Our righteousness must come by faith in Christ. If Paul had ended his message at the end of verse 20, we would have no hope. But Paul doesn't leave us lost in our sin. He goes on to describe how a man can be made righteous, or good, in God's sight. We can receive righteousness from God when we have faith in Jesus Christ. Paul then, in verses 23 and 24, summarizes our problem and God's solution. All men have sinned, but we can be saved by grace through the work of Jesus on the cross. The whole Old Testament (the Law and Prophets) points forward to this most amazing truth. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to make a way for sinners to be saved is what God's story is all about!

Our only boast is in Christ. If everything we have is based on what God has done, and if we have nothing based on what we have done, then we have nothing to boast about. The only thing we can take credit for is our sin. All our salvation, from start to finish, is by God's grace. Even the faith we have is a gift of God. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we would remain enemies of God. Paul lived his life this way. He celebrated his weaknesses and admitted his sin (1 Timothy 1:15), and he made his boast in the Lord (Galatians 6:14).

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WHERE IS THE GOSPEL?

Please use the following comments connecting today's lesson to the Gospel to help inform your understanding and serve you by aiding your preparation for class. Remember, we want to do more than present disconnected Bible stories and lessons to our young children. We want them to understand how each story in the Bible plays a part in God's greater plan of redemption.

Paul is basically defending the gospel in Romans 3. In verse 25 and 26 we see some important components of God's plan. First, it was God's willing plan. He presented Jesus as a sacrifice. Secondly, Jesus' sacrifice was an acceptable payment, or atonement, for our sin. Thirdly, this sacrifice was required to ensure the justice of God, who had allowed sins to go unpunished.

Earlier in this passage Paul clearly wanted to help us to see our total depravity and our utter inability to stand righteous apart from God's grace. Paul said, "None is righteous, no, not one," and "No one understands; no one seeks God," and "All have turned aside." He left absolutely no possibility that someone might be good apart from Christ.

After giving this convincing argument, Paul goes on to declare one of the best "buts" of Scripture: "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (Romans 3:21,22).



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ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Read the following Bible passage from the Old Testament. Use the following questions to help the children understand how this passage points to Christ in the New Testament.

Bible Passage: Isaiah 52:14,15

Connecting the passage to Christ:

These verses are found in the middle of Isaiah's description of the suffering servant. Jesus suffered greatly. Blood poured from wounds upon His face and head. The face of Jesus would have been bruised and swollen from being repeatedly struck by the soldiers' fists. The back of Christ would have been torn from the scourging. Clearly, people would have been appalled to look at Him. The blood shed upon the cross by Jesus would sprinkle many nations. The sprinkling of water was done as a rite of cleansing (Numbers 8:7 and 19:18,19). Blood sprinkled on those who were ceremonially unclean would sanctify them (Hebrews 9:13). The blood of Jesus sprinkled on the nations speaks of the cleansing of the nations by His sacrifice (Hebrews 10:22 and 12:24).

Questions for reflection:

- Why is it helpful to think about the suffering of Jesus? (We never want to forget the great humiliation and suffering Jesus went through to take away our sins.)
- How can remembering the suffering of Christ motivate us toward godly living? (When we realize that it was our sin that nailed Him to the cross and was the reason for Jesus' suffering, we hate sin all the more and look to live righteous lives by saying no to sin.)

SWORD BIBLE MEMORY

BE A DOER OF THE WORD

Take time during the class to review the *SWORD* Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.



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ACTIVITIES & OBJECT LESSONS

Use the following activities for practical application and discovery of this lesson. For the younger children, review the preschool questions and use them to help the children relate to the passage. For older children, ask them why they think this passage is in the Bible for us today. How is it supposed to affect our lives?

GOOD WORKS WON'T WORK

Supplies:

- several boxes of sugar cubes
- fifteen one dollar bills
- tape measure
- paper
- envelope
- prizes for class

The object of this lesson is to demonstrate that we could never be counted righteous before God by our good works.

Ask for three boys and three girls to help you. Tell the class that you are going to have a contest to see who can stack the most sugar cubes in a tower without it falling. The team who wins will secure a prize for all the boys or girls. And if you are able to stack enough cubes the members of the team will get a bonus. The first bonus is one dollar each, the second bonus is two dollars each and the highest bonus prize is five dollars each.

On a piece of paper write the following bonus distances and seal them in an envelope

Ten feet high – one dollar each

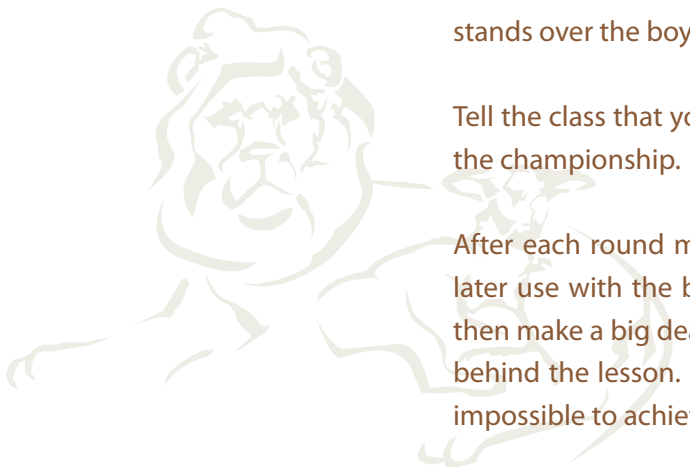
Twenty feet high – two dollars each

One hundred feet high – five dollars each.

The rules to the contest are as follows: One team will go first (flip a coin). They will stack as many sugar cubes as they can. They can stop at any time, but if their tower falls they can not win. If the boys try ten cubes, for instance, and their tower falls on the 11th cube. The girls could win by stacking two because their tower of two stands over the boys' collapsed tower of eleven.

Tell the class that you will do three rounds. The team with the most wins will take the championship.

After each round measure the height of the tower and write it on the board for later use with the bonus prize. After three rounds award the winning team and then make a big deal out of the bonus prize. Remember this is the whole purpose behind the lesson. You want them to think the distances for the bonus prize are impossible to achieve.



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Ask a volunteer to come up and rip open the bonus prize envelope to see if you have a bonus prize winner. Show off the money while the envelope is being opened. After the volunteer reads the bonus distances the class should be a bit shocked and begin to complain that the distances are impossible.

Use this as an opportunity to talk about just how impossible it is for us to get to God by our good works. Review Romans 3:20. Talk about how amazing it is that Jesus lived a perfect life for us. When we place our trust in Jesus and His death on the cross, our sins are forgiven. The added blessing is that we are declared righteous!

FREE MEANS FREE

Supplies:

- box of pretzels (enough for the class)
- a fancy tray to present them

The object of this lesson is to help the children understand that we are justified freely by God's grace – there is no payment we need to add.

Arrange the pretzels on a tray and enlist an adult volunteer to play the role of the pretzel salesman. You can follow the dialogue of this skit or just ad lib.

Pretzel salesman: (Knocks on your door and yells) "Pretzels. Free pretzels."

Teacher: "Please come in."

Pretzel salesman: (Comes in the classroom and repeats) "Pretzels. Free pretzels."

Teacher: "Are these free?"

Pretzel salesman: "Yes ma'am. Would you like some?"

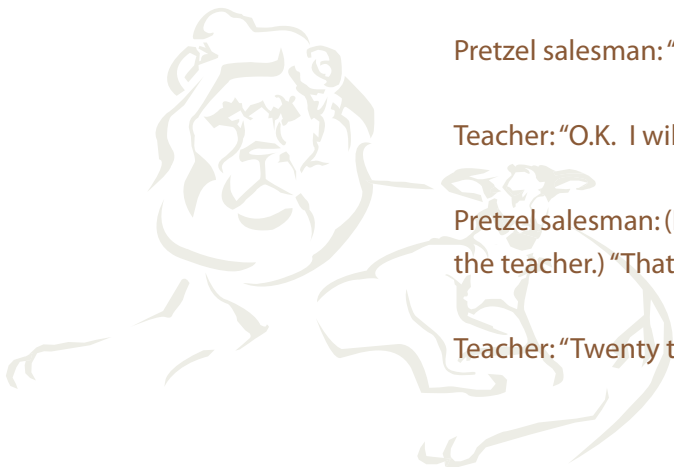
Teacher: "Could I have some for the entire class?"

Pretzel salesman: "Yes, you sure can."

Teacher: "O.K. I will take (counts the class and adds one for herself) twenty-three."

Pretzel salesman: (He counts out the number of pretzels out loud and then addresses the teacher.) "That will be twenty-three dollars." (one dollar for each pretzel)

Teacher: "Twenty three dollars? You said they were free."



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Pretzel salesman: "Why, ma'am, the pretzels are free. That is all the other miscellaneous charges."

Teacher: "Miscellaneous charges? How can you charge for something that is free? Free means free! If it's free, then you don't pay. Isn't that right?"

Pretzel salesman: "That is the way it used to be. Look, twenty-five cents is for shipping, twenty-five cents is for handling, twenty-five cents is for tax, and twenty-five cents is for pretzel breakage insurance. You will notice that none of these fine pretzels are broken!"

Teacher: "Look, (turning to class) help me out here class. Doesn't free mean free? (Teacher gets the class to participate.)"

Pretzel salesman: "Well, OK. I'll tell you what. I will drop my charges this time, but the next time you want free pretzels, you are going to have to pay. Nothing is totally free these days." (Pretzel salesman gives the pretzels to the teacher and leaves the room.)

Skit ends and the teacher then hands out the pretzels and makes the connection in the skit to our salvation which is free by God's grace. We cannot pay, or do good works, to get our salvation. There was a cost, but Jesus paid the price for us. So we pay nothing.

REACH HIGHER

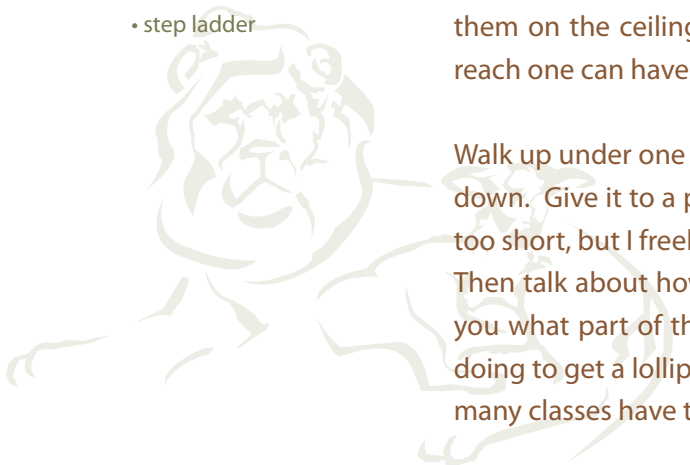
Supplies:

- lollipops (enough for the entire class)
- tape
- step ladder

Use this illustration to show the class that we all fall short of God's glory, but we can be freely justified by Jesus.

Prior to class tape lollipops on the ceiling. Continue class until someone notices them on the ceiling. Tell the class that anyone who can stand on their feet and reach one can have one. Then continue on with what you were doing.

Walk up under one of the lollipops and, using a step ladder, reach up and pull one down. Give it to a person and say: "You couldn't get this by your works. You were too short, but I freely give it to you." Repeat this for everyone who wants a lollipop. Then talk about how this exercise is like Romans 3:23–24. Ask the children to tell you what part of the exercise demonstrates grace. What part did you need help doing to get a lollipop? The answer is that it all demonstrates grace. After all, how many classes have they gone into that have lollipops on the ceiling?



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PRAYER

Pick several children to pray based on the day's scripture passages.

IN CLASS PROJECT

Draw a picture of a man standing on the edge of a great canyon with the far ledge on the opposite side of your paper. Draw the man small to indicate a tremendous gulf between the two sides. At the bottom of the chasm write the words: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Draw a bridge across the chasm with a slight arch and write these words along the bridge: "We are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Jesus." Then write across the top of your paper: "Grace alone through faith alone."



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FOR THE OLDER GRADES

REVIEW PAUL'S DESCRIPTION OF SINFUL MAN

Supplies:

White board

This exercise is designed to help the students identify with Paul's description. Take Romans 3:10-18 and ask the class how it applies to kids their age. Write the verse numbers on the board and the way they apply to youth to the right of each verse. Here are some clues for each verse:

11 – Children often talk back to their parents disrespectfully and say “I know” in response to a correction. Children often need to be told to do their devotions and do not seek God on their own.

12 – All children sin. Make a list of these sins..

13 – Children lie to their parents. Make a list of these situations.

14 – All children may not use foul language, but ask the class what kinds of sinful things they say to themselves after their parents punish them or take away a privilege due to their misbehavior.

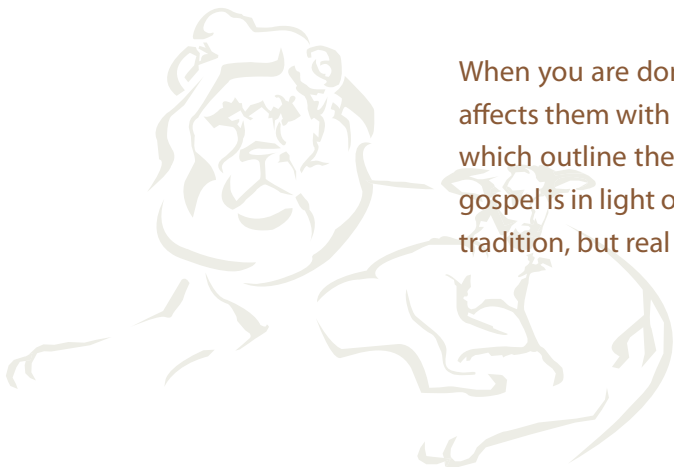
15 – Jesus said that if we are angry against our brother we have murdered him in our heart. Make a list of those people they get easily angry with.

16 – Make a list of the hardship that children their age cause by their sin.

17 – Make a list of the sins they commit which ruin the peace of their homes.

18 – Talk about how the fear of man influences their behavior.

When you are done, read the passage again and then ask the class if this passage affects them with more conviction now. Then go on to read the subsequent verses which outline the gospel and ask the class if they can see just how wonderful the gospel is in light of their sin. Help them to see that the gospel is not a trite religious tradition, but real salvation for real sinners.



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A LITTLE BIT MORE

Grace – In the Old Testament God's undeserving favor was given to men. This was a picture of God's free grace. Grace as a concept was defined by what Jesus did on the cross for us. Up until the sacrifice of Jesus, the idea of grace lacked the richness of meaning it has today. The Bible defines grace by the sacrifice of Jesus (Romans 5:15). When we receive God's grace, it not only brings salvation from judgment, but it impacts our entire lives by giving us undeserved power over sin. God's grace helps us in giving (2 Corinthians 8:7). Our conversation can be filled with grace toward others (Colossians 4:6). Through His grace we are encouraged (2 Thes. 2:16). And it is God's grace which teaches us to say no to ungodliness (Titus 2:11-12). God's grace is God's favor from first until last. Everything we have, everything we accomplish, and everything we know is undeserved, unmerited - the free gift of grace.

