

## The Great Divide

Sola Fide: Justification By Faith Alone – Part II

Romans 3:22-23

### Introduction

I want to draw your attention today, to one of the best known biblical verses in all of Christianity. Look at Romans, chapter 3, verse 23, which says,

*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

Not only is this verse well known within the church, but the apostle Paul has clearly provided, in this letter to the Romans, the inspired evidence that the truth of this verse is buried within the heart of mankind.

In fact, man will spend his lifetime trying to come to terms with this message written on his heart. Man will have questions, such as:

- How do I deal with guilt?
- What do I do about sin?
- Why do I have a sense of coming judgment?
- Why do I feel an emptiness, even when there are more and more things to fill my life?
- What can I do to bring peace to my mind concerning the afterlife?
- How do I make sure I end up eternally in a good place, instead of a bad place?
- How can I be right with God?

Religions, throughout time and around the world, are nothing more than man's organized effort to answer these questions. They may attempt to answer by such acts as: bathing in sacred water, taking a sacred journey, or performing acts of penance and self-sacrifice.

The Greeks, even before the time of the apostle Paul, had developed the Mystery Religions. This involved initiations into a spiritual oneness with a god who had suffered death and had been resurrected. That sounds familiar, right?! Then, the person who desired to be related to this god had to go through a series of initiations, known as identification rites. When the identification rites were completed, the initiate was, in the language of the Mysteries, a "twice-born" one, or simply put, "born again".

In one particular Mystery Religion, the initiate, after his identification rites were completed, was given milk to drink. This symbolized the fact that he was a newborn babe.

In one graphic Mystery ceremony, called taurobolium, a person came in direct contact with blood. In this Mystery identification rite, the initiate was lowered into a deep pit. Across the mouth of the pit, beams were placed in a lattice type arrangement. Then, on top of the beams, a bull that had been killed by its throat being cut, was laid. The blood of the bull would gush down into the pit. The initiate, in the pit below, was literally bathed in the blood as it fell down. This was considered his salvation. When the ceremony was over and he was brought up out of the pit, covered in blood, he was referred to as, "one reborn for all eternity".

The world is looking for spiritual answers. And, in its pursuit of answers, it is exercising great faith in all sorts of beliefs and systems.

However, the religions of man are as futile in their ability to deal with sin, guilt, and judgment as the little mouse that I read about recently. A man purchased a

white mouse to use as food for his pet snake. He dropped the mouse into the snake's glass cage, while the snake was sleeping in a bed of sawdust. The tiny mouse had a serious problem on his hands; or rather, on his little paws. At any moment, the sleeping snake could awaken and swallow him for supper. Obviously, he needed to come up with a brilliant plan. So, what did he do? He quickly set to work covering the snake with chips, until the sleeping snake was entirely covered with sawdust. With that, the mouse apparently thought he had his problem solved. The only salvation for that little mouse, however, came from outside the glass cage. The man took pity on the mouse and removed him from the cage.

Religion is like piling wood chips upon sleeping judgment.

I have seen people attempting to cover their guilt by going into baptismal water, performing acts of penance and self-sacrifice, piercing their bodies, being literally hanged upon wooden crosses, washing themselves in polluted rivers that they considered sacred, humming the chantras, praying to the spirits, and gazing at the stars. These activities are no more effective in producing salvation than allowing the blood of a bull to drench the body of a person who climbs down into a pit. They are no more effective than covering over our sin, guilt, and judgment with sawdust.

Paul has delivered the truth from God, when he tells us in Romans, chapter 3, verse 22, that final and full cleansing comes through,

*... faith in Jesus Christ ...*

Justification, or the legal declaration of our righteous standing before a holy God, has nothing to do with what we can do. It has everything to do with what Christ has already done. The term for this is, "Sola fide," which refers to, "faith in Christ alone," as the only One who can save us, and that is independent of our efforts and our good works.

The truth is, ladies and gentlemen, when you understand the gravity of Romans, chapter 3, verse 23,

*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

then, you begin to understand the absolute necessity of "Sola Fide".

## Universal Verdict: "all"

1. Paul begins this classic text with a universal verdict in the word, "all".

Paul is talking to everybody. The word "all" is comprehensive. It is inclusive, all embracing, and all encompassing. "All" leaves no one out or behind. No one can say, "Paul is only talking to the Romans; he is only writing to the first century Italians."

No. "All" is a reference to everyone from time past until this very moment.

Notice earlier, in verse 19 of chapter 3, Paul says, . . . *and all the world may become accountable to God*

There is the word "all" again. And what are we *all* included in?

## Irrevocable Condition: "have"

2. Paul says, in this universal verdict, that we are all included in an irrevocable condition, "for all have sinned . . .". The key word is the word we most often skip, and that is the word, "have". It is as important as the next word in the verse. This verb, in the Greek text, refers to something that happened in the past.

You need to understand that Paul is referring not so much to our sinful actions, as to our sinful nature. In other words, Paul is not talking about individual acts of corruption, he is talking about the condition of our character.

This verse is a reference to all of humanity sinning in Adam. Adam, the representative of the human race, sinned. That corrupted the fountainhead of the human race, so the water is now polluted. No matter how far downstream you are from Adam, which is thousands of years now, the water is still polluted.

Paul explains this further in Romans, chapter 5, verse 12,

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned*

So, Paul, in chapter 3, is viewing the entire human race as having sinned in Adam. And the proof of having Adam's sin nature is the fact that we, by nature, sin.

My wife and I knew there were some little birds in the rafters of our house, just outside our bathroom. We thought the nest was somewhere under the outside gutters. Then, Marsha was outside the other day, working in the yard, and she saw a vent open on the side of our house, outside of the bathroom wall,

and a bird fly out. She watched and, a little while later, that bird flew back and, with its beak, opened the flap on the vent and disappeared inside. That nest of little birds was actually inside the vent that ran from the ceiling of our bathroom to the outer wall. The sounds we had been hearing make sense to us now. We can hear the slam of the vent door and immediately, the loud chirping of those baby birds vying for as much of that worm as they can get. Then, we can hear the vent door slam shut again and the little birds stop chirping. The vent door opens and they chirp as loudly as they can.

That mother bird never gave her little ones any chirping lessons. She never taught them, “Now, if you want some of this worm, you’re gonna have to chirp first!”

No. They chirp for their mother’s attention instinctively. And, in a couple of weeks, thank the Lord, that mother is going to push those little birds out of that vent and they are going to instinctively flap their wings and fly. There is no Driver’s Education, followed by twelve months of flying with a permit. No! They will never be taught how to fly. They will, by nature, fly.

Just as a bird flies, by virtue of its nature, so we sin, by virtue of our nature. Just as a bird, because of its nature, loves to eat worms, so we, because of our nature, love to sin. And just as a bird flies without ever having to learn how, so we sin without ever having to be taught. We never had one lesson in how to sin.

Now, that does not excuse our sinful behavior, it merely reveals how corrupt our nature is and why we are all guilty.

And, notice that Paul is not referring, in verse 23, to the amount of our sins. He is not saying, “for all have sinned . . .”. If he said that, someone might say, “Well, I don’t fit in this verse because I don’t do as many sins as other people I know, so this verse isn’t for me.”

Paul, however, is not referring to the amount of our sins, but the nature of our sinfulness.

You could read verse 23 in this way, “for all have the nature of a sinner . . . for all have the nature of their father Adam . . . for all, by nature, instinctively sin”.

### **Irrefutable Offense: “sinned”**

3. And, therein lies the offense. Paul moves from the universal verdict, through the

irrevocable condition, to the irrefutable offense, “for all have sinned . . .”.

You can deny it, but that does not matter – all have sinned.

You can excuse it, but that does not change the offense to God’s holy character – all have sinned.

You can say that you do not think it is really that bad, but that does not matter – all have sinned.

You can even claim that there is no such thing as sin. That is what the Russian Dictionary, published after the Communists came to power in Russia, attempted to do. After the entry of the word “sin,” was the definition: “archaic word denoting the transgression of a mythical divine law.” It does not even matter how you define it in the dictionary – all have sinned!<sup>i</sup>

### **Impassable Chasm: “and fall short”**

4. Because of this irrefutable offense, Paul reveals the truth of an impassable chasm, “for all have sinned and fall short . . .”.

This phrase is “husterountai,” in the Greek, and means, “to come short of, to be utterly lacking”.<sup>ii</sup>

“Husterountai” was used by Greek farmers, in the first century, for a farmer who missed the season; a farmer who failed to get the seed into the ground on time and thus, failed to get a crop. So, in other words, this verse is saying, “for all have sinned and missed the season of the glory of God”.

“Husterountai” was used in ancient Egypt to refer to those who were uneducated and could not read. Thus, you could render this verse, “for all have sinned and are illiterate of the glory of God”.

“Husterountai” was used in the financial world of the apostle Paul to refer to someone who was bankrupt. So, this verse could be translated, “for all have sinned and are bankrupt of the glory of God”.<sup>iii</sup>

Let us suppose that I asked all in this auditorium to stand on top of your seats and to, on the count of three, take one jump to where I am on the stage. Even if your eternal life depended on it, not one would make it to the platform. The divide; the chasm; the separation is too great.

Some would jump further than others. Those on the front row would land closer than those on the back row. But, all would fall short!

It does not matter what kind of person you are standing there on your chair. You may be morally

upright, educated, articulate, open minded, generous, kind, and well connected, but you are going to fall short because you also have sinned and failed to meet God's holy standard.

A man in Detroit, Michigan, did everything he could to meet the standard height for law enforcement officers, which was five feet seven inches. He was five feet five inches tall and thus, two inches too short. He tried pulleys, and he even tried a stretching rack. It almost worked, as he nearly stretched the two needed inches. When he had exhausted everything however, he was still five-eighths of an inch short. All of his hard efforts drew the attention of the press, and the public. The police commissioner eventually changed the rules and allowed individuals to apply, regardless of their height!

God, however, does not change the rules when He gets a bad press report. His verdict is unchangeable.

Not only is the verdict comprehensive; mankind's condition irrevocable; sin an irrefutable offense, the distance between sinful man and holy God an impassable chasm, but it only gets worse.

## Unreachable Goal: "of the glory of God"

5. The fifth declaration found imbedded in this verse is that heaven is an unreachable goal, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God".

What was Paul really intending to communicate? The word translated "glory," is the word "doxa". It is the same Greek word from which we get our word, "doxology".

The word "doxa," originally meant, "to appear," and eventually came to refer to, "having an opinion about someone". Over time, the word came to refer only to, "that which was a positive or good opinion". From there, it developed further to mean, "praise, honor, and glory which came from that good opinion".

So, when Paul says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," he is saying that sinful mankind is unable to praise, honor, and glorify God.

That is not all, however. The Greek word "doxa," is used to translate the Hebrew word "shekinah". This sheds another volume of truth on Paul's use of the word "glory," in this verse.

"Shekinah" refers to the splendor and brightness of God's presence. Biblical examples include:

- When the tabernacle of the Lord was completed in Exodus, chapter 40, the "shekinah" glory of God descended.
- Later in Israel's history, the location of the ark signified the place of God's "shekinah".
- God again revealed His "shekinah" glory through a cloud at the dedication of Solomon's temple, in I Kings, chapter 8.
- When the apostle John was describing the birth of Christ, he wrote that in Christ, we saw the glory of the Father.
- In Matthew, chapter 2, I believe the star that led the wise men to young Jesus, was a manifestation of the "shekinah" glory. The same "Shekinah" that led the Israelites for forty years, also led the magi to the Redeemer.
- In Acts, chapter 9, we are told that when the apostle Paul was traveling on the road to Damascus, he saw the glory of the resurrected Christ and was blinded by His brightness.
- When Stephen was stoned to death, Acts, chapter 7, records that Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the "shekinah" glory of God and Jesus Christ standing there to receive Him.

To "fall short of the glory of God" means that mankind cannot praise, honor, and glorify God as he should, and also that mankind will never live in the presence of God's "shekinah glory;" man will never be able to reach the glorious, brilliant place where Jesus Christ, the Son of God, resides!

So, "all have sinned and fall short of the 'shekinah' of God" – unless man admits his bankrupt nature, confesses his sin, and receives his free ticket to cross the bridge that can span this great divide.

## The Free Ticket to Cross the Great Divide – Faith in Jesus Christ

What is that ticket? Paul writes in Romans, chapter 3, verse 24,

*being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*

And, in verse 22 again,

*even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe . . .*

Yes, there is:

- a universal verdict,
- an irrevocable condition,
- an irrefutable offense,
- an impassable chasm, and
- an unreachable goal.

Oh, but my friends, there is an eternal bridge – a bridge that crosses the great divide. It is a wooden cross. It is an altar of sacrifice where our Lord Jesus died to pay the eternal penalty for you, not just your sin, but your sinful nature. And, He offers you, what Paul calls, in verse 24, “a gift,” which is the righteousness and the redemption in Jesus Christ.

Several years ago, there was an Arthur Murray dance instructor who had been out late on Saturday night. In the wee hours of the morning, he staggered back to his hotel room, fell into bed, and went to sleep. The next morning, he was suddenly jolted awake by the hotel room clock radio. A man was preaching and was asking this question, “If in the next few moments you should die and find yourself before God and He should ask you, ‘What right do you have to come into My heaven?’ what would you say?”

The dance instructor was amazed and confounded by this question. He realized that he did not have an answer; not one single thing to say. He sat silently on the edge of his bed, while the preacher, the late Donald Grey Barnhouse, explained the answer. That dance instructor knelt down by his bed that morning and placed his faith in Jesus Christ alone; “Sola Fide.” He found the gift of God through

Jesus Christ, which is forgiveness and a future home in heaven.

By the way, that dance instructor was D. James Kennedy. He eventually went into the ministry and pastors, to this day, at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church. He also began a ministry of evangelism, called Evangelism Explosion, that we teach in our church. It is an evangelism strategy that begins by asking people, “If you were to die today and stand before God and God should ask you, ‘Why should I let you into heaven?’ what would you say?”<sup>iv</sup>

What would your answer be, my friend? Why do you think you are going to heaven? What right do you have to ever think you could live for eternity in the presence of “shekinah” glory?

Paul tells us in Romans, chapter 3, verse 23,

***for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God[!]***

That means you . . . that means me!

There is no way for you to reach heaven; there is no way for you to get across this great divide. This is the great divide between earth and heaven; between corruption and “shekinah” glory, and there is no way for you to cross on your own – “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God!*”

There is only one way. You must travel on that bridge fashioned in the form of an old rugged cross – it has created an eternal bridge, between earth and heaven; between corruption and “shekinah” glory; between religion and redemption. This is the bridge built by our Redeemer. For Jesus Christ said Himself, as recorded in John, chapter 14, verse 6b,

***. . . no one comes to the Father but through Me.***

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/19/2002 by Stephen Davey.

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<sup>i</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, Romans Vol. 2 (Eerdmans Publishing, 1982), p. 71.

<sup>ii</sup> Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Zondervan Publishing, 1976), p. 356.

<sup>iii</sup> Barnhouse, p. 72.

<sup>iv</sup> James Montgomery Boice, Romans Volume One (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1991), p. 327.