Abstract
Because πᾶς is a rather elastic pronominal adjective, the sense and scope of “all” must be carefully handled in context. The expression “all have sinned” in Rom 3:23 is tightly focused on “all who believe” in Rom 3:22, thus making more of Jew-Gentile relations in the early church than providing a prooftext of universal condemnation. Such a recognition also helps clarify that 3:24 is from Paul rather than traditional material. While it is undoubtedly true Paul sees the whole of humanity as condemned (cf. Rom 5:12), the scope of “all” is without distinction more than it is without exception.

Keywords
Rom 3:21-26; Universalism; πᾶς

Introduction
It can hardly be disputed that in Rom 1:18-3:20 Paul catches the immoral, the moral, the Gentile and the Jew in his wide net of condemnation. But in the crucial following paragraph Paul describes believers in an unexpected parenthesis (3:23-24) whose syntax has tied interpreters in knots. But the syntactical tension need not paralyze a contextually sensitive interpretation.

Paul’s expression “all have sinned” in Rom 3:23 refers grammatically (not simply logically) at the narrow point of the argument only to “all who believe” (3:22c).¹ Thus, the scope of all in “all have sinned” is without distinction rather than without exception. There is value in recognizing an emphasis on Jew-Gentile equality in the scope of Rom 3:21-26 because

¹) My Doktorvater D.B. Wallace was the first to tell me he suspected Paul meant all believers. Special thanks are due him for the suggestion as I pursued dissertation research on πᾶς. Special thanks are also due to Robert Jewett, who kindly read an earlier draft of this article and encouraged me to submit it to NovT for publication.
the particularly besetting syntactical difficulty of δικαιούμενοι ("justified") in v. 24 still needs a satisfactory answer. This need is evident not only in explaining the theological implications of vv. 23-24, but also in confirming the consensus on the boundaries of a possible pre-Pauline composition.

The interpretation of “all” as “all believers” in Rom 3:23 leads to the realization that vv. 23-24 underscore the equality of Jewish and Gentile believers—neither has an advantage over the other in relationship to God. Even so, while this reading challenges most interpretations of the verse, it is still not at odds with the idea in Rom 1:18-3:20 that all humanity stands condemned before God. Rom 3:23-24 is more an exploration of the current equality of justified sinners. The syntactical difficulty of δικαιούμενοι, then, is really the problem of an open door to theological universalism. A tight reading of vv. 23-24 has the possible conclusion, “if all sinned, then all are justified.” A right understanding of the referent of πάντες (“all”) prevents any potential universalist interpretation taking root in Rom 3:23.

Paul’s gospel is universalist in an ethnological sense, since it is “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16 NET). The offer of salvation is universal in that anyone without distinction, i.e., regardless of race, can be a beneficiary. On the other hand, the term universalism has usually been reserved to describe eschatological universalism; i.e., that all people without exception will be saved in the future, regardless of their relationship to God through Jesus Christ.2 Traditional approaches to Romans 3 reject this kind of eschatological universalism. Universal condemnation of humanity by God goes hand in hand with eschatological particularism, the idea that only those who believe will be saved. In the traditional interpretation of Rom 3:23 the assertion of universal condemnation is common because this reading suits the context.3 While universal human sinfulness is undoubtedly found in Rom 5:12, the focus of 3:23 is narrowed so that only the sinfulness of believers is in view.


To demonstrate my contention, we will consider the syntactical problems of vv. 23-24 and then apply the results of my previous study on the use of πᾶς (“all, every”). A more tightly focused understanding of “all” in v. 23 will help resolve the seemingly intractable syntactical difficulties of v. 24.

The Problems of Verses 22-24

Our discussion of the Greek text will use Douglas Campbell’s helpful verse divisions.\(^4\) The main problem of vv. 23-24 is the syntax of δικαιούμενοι (“justified”), because the “all” of v. 23 are the same people who are “justified” in v. 24. The jarring contrast with the preceding context of universal condemnation leads some interpreters to unsatisfactory explanations of the syntax. Consider the text in clausal layout (below).\(^5\)

The relative position left-to-right of each line beginning reflects a level of grammatical subordination. Notice that vv. 23-24 fall farther to the right because of the subordinating conjunction γάρ (“for”) in v. 22d and v. 23. The γάρ of v. 22 amplifies εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας (“to all who believe”), giving the ground on which Paul uses “all.” Not only Jews, but also Gentiles, receive the righteousness of God. The γάρ of v. 23 explains the statement of 22d that there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles on the single demand of faith for justification.


δικαιούμενοι δωρεάν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ

The awkwardness of δικαιούμενοι in v. 24 is almost universally recognized. This apparent syntactical difficulty (along with the unusual vocabulary of vv. 25-26) led Bultmann first, then Käsemann, to regard most of vv. 24-26 as a pre-Pauline composition. On this theory vv. 24-26 are uncomfortably inserted at this point; the abrupt intrusion of δικαιούμενοι is explained in terms of quotation from another source. But vv. 23-24 can be explained without such recourse. It is far easier to believe that vv. 25-26 may be a pre-Pauline composition, since v. 25 begins with the relative pronoun (cf. Phil 2:6; Col 1:15; 1 Tim 3:16), often one of the main indicators of poetic or hymnic material. The scholarly consensus on Rom 3:24-26 now seems to have rejected the idea that v. 24 is part of a quotation. But while it is possible (though by no means necessary) that Paul in vv. 25-26 draws on an early Christian composition, it is an unlikely expedient to assume that v. 24 begins the traditional material.

Even if v. 24 is not an abrupt leap into song, the participle δικαιούμενοι at its head still seems so difficult as to be a constructio ad sensum, especially since it applies to the very people who sinned and fall short of God’s standard. The participle δικαιούμενοι at the surface

---


8) Campbell, *Rhetoric*, 57; Lohse, *Römer*, 132. It is a telling criticism against Käsemann’s view that the support for finding a quotation comes almost entirely from vv. 25-26 (Talbert, “Non-Pauline Fragment,” 287).
syntactical level is subordinate to ἥμαρτον (“[all] have sinned”) and ὑστεροῦνται (“they fall short”). Yet this construal at first glance leaves the paragraph’s concept of “righteousness” in too deep a structure.9 Nevertheless, the main term “righteousness” still stands in a prominent place in v. 21, so this objection is no real difficulty. The intuition of most interpreters seems to take the participle as concessive, meaning the main verb takes place in spite of the action of the participle.10 But if it is concessive, it is an odd reversal of word order, since δικαιούμενοι comes after the verb it modifies rather than before, as one might expect of concessive participles. Moreover, concessive is a difficult label to apply because the action of the participle takes place in spite of the main verb. The simplest expedient converts the verbs ἥμαρτον and ὑστεροῦνται into participles, so that the sense is something like ὑστεροῦμενοι...δικαιοῦνται.11 The reversal clarifies an otherwise extremely difficult text: “though they fall short, they are justified” (cf. RSV). Though this construal helps explain the lexical and logical contrast between the participle and the two verbs, it falls short of clarifying the participle’s position.

Taken in a straightforward way, the subject πάντες in v. 23 also receives the action of the passive participle δικαιούμενοι, so that the very same “all” who sinned are justified. This is precisely the point at which an unrestricted (implicative) sense to πάντες as “all without exception” becomes a problem. If all without exception in the human race are meant by “all sinned,” then all without exception are justified. I think this surface reading is the real, though often unstated, reason δικαιούμενοι has been identified as a problem. In fact, Jewett notices this implication “remains undeveloped by commentators perhaps out of concern that it might

---

imply universal salvation.” This point would be one on which eschatological universalist exegesis could capitalize, though I know of no such use in the commentaries. Some commentators do recognize the difficulties created by a cursory reading of vv. 23-24. But ultimately a construal of this text as universalist in the eschatological sense is a vain hope.

The traditional method of handling δικαιούμενοι in v. 24a is to apply it logically only to πάντας τούς πιστεύοντας (“all who believe”) in v. 23c. Since the exegetical result is sufficient to indemnify Paul from any charge of eschatological universalism, the rest seems an open and shut case. This solution is syntactically on weak footing, and commentators often seek a basis upon which the logical limitation of “all” can legitimately be made. Moo says when connected to v. 22, πάντες in v. 23 “indicates not universality (‘everybody’) but lack of particularity (‘anybody’).” Keck opines that the emphasis for Paul was probably not on believe but on all in light of this statement’s context in Jew-Gentile relations. These are helpful suggestions, but still insufficiently grounded in the syntax of this passage.

The most popular solution takes vv. 22b-23 as a parenthesis with v. 24 as a resumption of v. 22a. But even on this reading the participle δικαιούμενοι remains in an awkward position because it is nominative (agreeing with πάντες in v. 23) rather than accusative (in concord with πάντας in v. 22). An even more satisfactory solution is to expand the scope of the parenthesis to take in vv. 22d-24a. Thus, the support of the contention in v. 22a-c that the righteousness of God is given “to all who believe” includes the participle in v. 24a, and justification takes place in spite of sinfulness. Douglas Campbell, whose work we have already referenced, makes a case for just such a reading, but not on grammatical grounds. Instead, Campbell’s study emphasizes ancient rhetorical technique. The repetition of διά prepositional phrases, a stylistic device called

12) Jewett, Romans, 281.
13) See, for instance, Wilckens, Römer, 1:188-89.
14) See, for instance, G.R. Osborne, Romans (IVPNTC; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004) 94-95.
15) Moo, Romans, 227.
17) Ibid. See also J. Murray, The Epistle to the Romans (2 vols.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) 1:114, and the various options laid out by Sanday and Headlam (Romans, 85) and evaluated by Cranfield (Romans, 1:205).
epanaphora,\(^\text{18}\) gives Campbell grounds to isolate vv. 22d-24a from the rest of the sentence. Placing the διά prepositional phrases in visual parallel reveals the rhetorical framework:

\[
\begin{align*}
22a & \quad \text{δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (πεφανέρωται)} \\
   b & \quad \text{διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ} \\
   c & \quad \text{εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας... (parenthesis 22d-24a)} \\
24b & \quad \text{διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ} \\
25a & \quad \text{ὅν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς ἰλαστήριον,} \\
   b & \quad \text{διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι}\(^\text{19}\)
\end{align*}
\]

Thus, it seems clearer that vv. 22d-24a should be taken parenthetically, not only because of the two γάρ conjunctions, but also because of the parallel rhetorical function of the prepositional phrases. In Jewett’s opinion, Campbell provides the solution to the syntactical dilemma.\(^\text{20}\)

But to close the loop, we need an examination of the function of πᾶς in this text.

The Sense and Scope of “All”

The way to explain the sense of the text without tedious exegetical gymnastics is to examine more carefully how πᾶς can be used, particularly because it is a pronominal adjective. As a pronominal adjective, πᾶς is similar in syntax and function to ἀυτός, οὗτος, and ἐκεῖνος.\(^\text{21}\) As adjectives modifying substantives they are frequently in the predicate position (i.e., outside the article-noun group), but have an attributive sense. In articular constructions with substantives, for instance, πᾶς occurs in the predicate position almost all the time.\(^\text{22}\)


\(^{19}\) Ibid., 90-95. I have supplied the verse notations. Talbert’s (*Romans*, 107) assessment is very similar.


\(^{22}\) There are 1234 occurrences of πᾶς in the body text of NA27 (1278 if ἅπας is included) 474 of which involve the article. Only nine times can πᾶς be found in the
For help with the syntax of vv. 23-24, syntactically similar instances of πᾶς are the greatest assets. Anarthrous independent uses like Rom 3:23 account for 347 occurrences in the main text of NA27, most of which tend toward a pronominal usage.23 Pronouns naturally point to their antecedents. When πᾶς functions pronominally, then, it has a built-in anaphoric quality, and the scope of the antecedent limits the possible application of “all.”

Of course, there are many pronominal examples of πᾶς that imply a full-forced “all.” In John’s expression πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο (“everything came into being through him” John 1:3) the assertion of the Word’s role as creator carries the authority of the following expression χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἕν (“and apart from him not even one thing came into being”). When Jesus says παρὰ δὲ θεῷ πάντα δυνατά (“but with God all things are possible” Matt 19:26) he probably means “everything” rather than only a narrower focus on potential salvation for the rich.

Some statements have an implicative sense mostly because they are gnomic or timeless aphorisms that happen to use πᾶς. When Jesus says πᾶς ἔσται ὡς ὁ διδάσκαλος αὐτοῦ (“everyone will be like his teacher” Luke 6:40) or πᾶς γὰρ πυρὶ ἁλισθήσεται (“for everyone will be salted with fire” Mark 9:49) he has no one in particular, and everyone in general in mind. Perhaps the same kind of generalized force is meant of the purpose of John the Baptist’s coming “so that all might believe” (ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν John 1:7; cf. 11:48); it is possible (the contingency of the subjunctive mood) at least for everyone to believe. It is not envisioned that everyone without exception will believe in Jesus, for “his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11).

But more to the point, several good examples of πᾶς parallel the usage of Rom 3:23. For ease of reading, only parts of verses will appear.

αἱ ἀδελφαὶ αὐτοῦ οὐχὶ πᾶσαι πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἰσιν; “his sisters—are they not all with us?” (Matt 13:56)
The reference to Jesus’ sisters in the pendant nominative at the head of the clause is resumed by πᾶσαι, by which is meant all his sisters, not all people (or women) in general.

καὶ ἔφαγον πάντες “and everyone ate” (Matt 14:20 [par. Mark 6:42])

The five thousand beneficiaries of Jesus’ miracle ate to their satisfaction. πάντες points back to the crowds in the previous verse (cf. John 17:21; Mark 6:50; Heb 1:14).

ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει οὖν τίνος τῶν ἑπτὰ ἔσται γυνή; πάντες γὰρ ἔσχον αὐτήν. “So, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven [husbands] will she be? Because they all had her” (Matt 22:28)

The Sadducees’ parable ends in an attempt to trap Jesus in an untenable position: none of the unfortunate husbands could lay claim to the woman in the eschaton should a resurrection occur. Their question surely does not imply that everyone in the human race had her as a wife. The conjunction γάρ also takes a backward glance at the preceding discussion, thus reinforcing the anaphora of the pronominal sense of πάντες.24 In several examples nearby pronouns or finite verbs impose limitations on the scope of πᾶς.

ὑμεῖς καθαροί ἐστε, ἀλλ’ οὐχὶ πάντες “you are clean, but not all [of you]” (John 13:10)

The scope of “all” is the circle of the disciples, both at the level of grammar (“you”) and at the level of the conversation context in the upper room.

ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ λέγητε πάντες “so that you all might say the same thing” (1 Cor 1:10)

As in the previous example, the second person plural of the verb λέγητε serves to limit the scope of “all” to the Corinthian church (see also 1 Cor 8:1; Gal 3:26; 1 Thess 5:5; 2 Tim 4:16).

24 Ibid., 105.
For parallels to Rom 3:23, the most compelling example of usage is surely 1 Cor 10:1-4.

Verse one calls the Exodus generation οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν πάντες (“our fathers, all [of them]”), with a continued emphasis on their shared experience of wilderness miracles, each sentence beginning with πάντες. It is evident that πάντες does not mean everyone everywhere, but all of the people previously established as forebears. The anaphoric property of the pronominal use keeps pointing back to “fathers” in v. 1.25

So then πάντες seen as a pronoun in Rom 3:23 helps resolve the difficulty posed by δικαιούμενοι in v. 24 without needlessly complicating the explanation. The “all” who sinned and fall short of God’s glory are the same ones who in v. 24a are “justified.” But because the scope of “all” is limited by pronominal anaphora to “all who believe” (v. 22c), there is no need to seek alternative grammatical or historical solutions. Verses 22d-24a clarify what is meant by “all who believe”—there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles who believe; they are without distinction all justified by faith.

It might be objected that a progressive present tense of the verb ὑπέρθεινται (“they go on falling short”) presents a difficulty for my view, for on such a reading the verb describes unbelievers who lack the glory of God. It could simply be a gnomic present describing what is generally true.26 But an even more important reply is that Rom 8:19-22 speaks of the glory of God as a hope from which “even Christians ‘fall short’” until its final revelation in the eschaton.27 The gap between being

---

25) Ibid.
declared righteous and actually attaining the experience of true harmony with the glory of God, then, is spanned by the present tense. Neither Jewish believers nor Gentile believers attain to the full expression of God’s righteous standard, even though they are declared righteous by grace through faith.

The applicational conclusions of the traditional exegesis of Rom 3:23 (that Romans teaches universal sinfulness) are thus in need of refinement. The broader context of Rom 1:18-3:20 advances the thesis that everyone in the human race has sinned. It would be foolish to deny that Paul draws on this already established point as he moves forward. Even Campbell, who helpfully resolves the syntactical difficulty of v. 24 maintains the most common position on v. 23, “Whereas one would expect some direct expansion of the idea that all are saved by faith, Paul refers to a different universality, namely the universality of sin.”

The twist in Rom 3:23 is that all believers sinned. The implication for the broader context is still the same—that all people without exception are sinners. And since believers are a subset of humanity, the syllogism follows: all people are sinners; believers are people; therefore all believers are sinners. But at this point in Paul’s argument the emphasis of “all” in Rom 3:23 functions to erase Jew-Gentile distinctions. By using “all” in the pronominal sense, Paul isolates believers from the rest of sinful humanity to focus on their lack of distinction in their new status. The idea is not so much that all sinned as it is that all believers were once sinners who now await the revelation of God’s glory (Rom 8:19-22).

Since all believers are now justified (cf. Rom 5:1) in the same way, there is no basis for Jewish Christians claiming superiority over Gentile Christians. In fact, Paul goes out of his way to knock down Jewish feelings of superiority in Romans (e.g., 2:17, 25; 3:1, 9) while still carefully affirming God’s special relationship with Abraham’s regenerate descendants (Rom 9-11). πᾶς frequently appears in Romans where Paul compares Jews and Gentiles (1:16; 2:9-11; 3:19-20; 10:10-14), reinforcing the ethnological universalism of Romans’ theme. When Paul wrote Romans, the question of Jewish privilege (and Gentile conformity with their practice), even within the early Christian community, was still a live issue (Acts 10:1-11:22; 15:1-35; Rom 14; Gal 2:11-16). Thus, Rom

29) Campbell, Rhetoric, 89.
30) Ibid., 89-90 n. 2.
3:21-26 is primarily concerned about how Jews and Gentiles as believers co-exist in the church (cf. Eph 2:11-22).

**Conclusions**

Paul does not state universal condemnation in Rom 3:23 as explicitly as commentators have read this verse to mean. It is not so much a statement of condemnation as it is the theological underpinning of the equality of Jews and Gentiles. While it is true that all people without exception sinned, Paul's main idea in Rom 3:23 is that all believers, regardless of whether they enjoy the supposed privileges of Jewish heritage, once stood before God prior to salvation in the same position of condemnation. All believers were on equal footing before God, and Jewish Christians did not enjoy a particular advantage.

At the same time, Paul still believes all people without exception are sinners. I think it is a far more defensible an exegesis of Rom 5:12 or even Rom 1:18-3:20 to demonstrate this point. Romans 3:23 advances the idea of universal human sinfulness only secondarily. It is more a statement of the equality of Jews and Gentiles as justified sinners (and sinners being justified) than it is a statement about the equality of Adam's descendants as sinners condemned. All believers on this side of the eschaton stand before God the same way. With this in mind, we can see more clearly Paul’s concern to pave the way for Jews and Gentiles alike to proclaim his gospel actively.