

Take-Home 4: Justified by His Grace

Romans 3:9-31 · Keep this sheet; bring it back each week

What We Found

The verdict came first: "all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (3:9), sealed with the Psalter's own words, "none that does good, no, not one" (Ps 14:3), so that "every mouth may be stopped" (3:19). The law is a diagnosis, not a cure: "through the law comes knowledge of sin" (3:20). Then the two words that turn the letter: "But now" (3:21). The righteousness of God has stepped out of promise into history: all who believe are "justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (3:24).

And we found what "expiation" (3:25) means. Paul's word *hilasterion* is the Greek Old Testament's name for the mercy seat: the golden cover of the ark where God said "There I will meet with you" (Ex 25:22) and where atoning blood was sprinkled each year (Lev 16:14-15). Christ crucified is that meeting place, put forward publicly for all who believe. Boasting is excluded (3:27); the gift leaves nothing to brag about; and the faith that receives it, Scripture insists, is never alone in the person it saves (Jas 2:24, 26): it works, which is where this study began: the obedience of faith (1:5).

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. CLEMENT OF ROME

Writing about AD 96, St. Clement says we "are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom or understanding or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart, but by that faith through which Almighty God has justified all men from the beginning" (1 Clement 32), and immediately adds: shall we then grow slack in doing good? "May the Master never allow this to happen" (1 Clement 33). Justified by faith, therefore eager in works: Rome's teaching in the first century.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

God who "created us without us" did not will to "save us without us" (Sermon 169, cited at CCC 1847). Justification is entirely gift, and it is given to persons: it awakens the freedom it saves, producing consent, repentance, and love rather than replacing them.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. ANSELM OF CANTERBURY

St. Anselm, in *Why God Became Man*, teaches in substance that sin is a debt only humanity owes and only God can pay; so the one who saves must be both. His meditation shows why it was supremely fitting that the mercy seat be a person and the blood upon it his own: this study's biblical application of his argument.

Live It This Week

- Once this week, kneel before a crucifix for five silent minutes with Exodus 25:22 in mind: "There I will meet with you."
- Practice receiving: let someone do something for you without repaying or deflecting, and let it teach you about grace.
- Write out Romans 3:23-24 by hand, put it where you will see it daily, and say it as a prayer of thanks each morning.

Memory Verse

"Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

Romans 3:23-24 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Romans 4 once, slowly; Abraham takes the stand. Catechism references for this session: CCC 1992, 1996, 1847. Keep your sealed My Guess sheet safe; it opens in Session 8.