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SESSION ONE

Romans 3:9-31

Learner Session Guide

Focus Statement

We are not saved by anything we do, but by God's grace alone.

Key Verse

They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. **Romans 3:24**

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

Focus Image



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Gather

Check-in

Take this time to connect or reconnect with the others in your group.

Pray

Gracious God, thank you for meeting us here in this moment. We join this group for a variety of reasons and with a variety of emotions. But we all come together to better understand you and your Word. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear. Open our hearts and minds to the promise of your grace, which comes to us in many ways, but especially today in Paul's letter to the Romans. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Focus Activity

Some people picture salvation as a journey, and some think of it as a destination. Look at the Focus Image. List three things that come to mind when you see the words *saved* or *salvation*.

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Open Scripture

Read Romans 3:9-31.

- What words or phrases in this Scripture text stand out to you?

- What confuses or concerns you?

- What gives you hope?

Join the Conversation

Historical Context

1. Knowing the historical setting and background can help us better understand a Scripture text. Paul, a missionary who worked throughout the Roman Empire, wrote this letter as well as several others. We do not know much about the members of the Roman church that Paul was addressing, however, or about the specific circumstances under which he wrote the letter. In this case, the text itself holds some important clues.
 - Paul speaks about both Jews (God's chosen people who had been promised a Messiah) and Gentiles (all people who are not Jews). What might this tell us about members of the church in Rome? How do you suppose they viewed each other?
 - Read Genesis 17:9-14. How does this passage help you tell who the circumcised and uncircumcised are in the Romans passage (3:30)?

2. Paul emphasizes that all people have sinned.

- What might this tell us about the context or circumstances behind the writing of the letter?

Literary Context

1. Paul tends to write very long sentences—many are more than one verse in length. In addition, Paul’s lengthy sentences can be quite difficult to understand. Therefore, it helps to pay close attention to Paul’s use of vocabulary and grammar.

- List the words or phrases Paul seems to emphasize in this text. How did you choose these words and phrases?
- Choose a verse or sentence in the text and paraphrase it in your own words.

2. Notice the nine verses that look like poetry (3:10-18). These verses come from many places in Hebrew Scripture, including Ecclesiastes, Psalms, and Isaiah.

- Why would Paul quote from Hebrew Scripture here and in many other places in his letters?
- What does this tell you about Paul?

3. A speaker’s tone of voice gives us clues to the meaning of what is said. A writer’s “tone of voice” gives us clues, too.

- Look at Romans 3:9-31 again, imagining how Paul might read it out loud. Describe Paul’s “tone of voice” in this section of Romans.
- How might the tone shed light on the text?

Lutheran Context

1. For Lutherans, one of the main lenses through which we read Scripture is law and gospel. In Romans 3:9-31, Paul focuses on the law. The law here does not refer to a long list of “do’s and don’ts,” but to what God asks of us. Gospel is what God does for us.

- Define the law according to the session Scripture text. What is the function of the law? Is the law “good” or “bad”?
- Where does Paul discuss the gospel in this text?
- How do law and gospel relate to one another?



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2. The message of Romans led to a turning point in Martin Luther's life, and his insight on justification by grace through faith became a key part of Lutheran faith. Justification by grace through faith means we are not justified or saved by anything that we do. Rather, through Jesus, God has acted on our behalf to forgive our sins, put us right with God, and save us.

- List what humans do, according to Romans 3:9-31.
- List what God and Jesus do, according to the text.

Devotional Context

1. Paul emphasizes that everybody falls short of what God asks of us. Everybody is under the power of sin. These words are heard by people in different ways at different times.

- How do you hear these words? Do you hear them as law? As gospel?

2. Role-play how you would respond if a close friend or family member asked, "What must I do to get to heaven?"

3. We are justified by God's grace as a gift through faith.

- How do you feel about this gift? Do you set it aside for special occasions or keep it out for daily use?
- Write a poem or prayer celebrating the gift of God's grace.

Wrap-up

Be ready to look back over the work your group has done in this session.

Pray

Creator God, thank you for responding to our sinfulness, our brokenness, with your loving grace. We understand that we have all sinned and have fallen short in your eyes. Yet, we also know that we are justified by your grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. We give you thanks for this promise. We give you thanks for this good news. Increase our faith so that we might more deeply understand and more completely respond to this gift. Help us to walk together as your children. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Extending the Conversation

Homework

1. Read the Scripture text for the next session: Romans 5:1-11. If time permits, read all of Romans 1:1—5:11 (see below for a daily reading plan).
2. In a journal, note your thoughts or questions regarding the session Scripture text throughout the week.
3. Make a list of experiences you have with various laws throughout the week. What functions do the laws perform?
4. Romans is a letter Paul wrote to people he did not personally know. Revive the art of letter writing this week. Write and send a hand-written note to someone with whom you have fallen out of touch.

Enrichment

1. If you want a daily plan for reading through Romans during this unit, read the following sections this week:
 - Day 1: Romans 1:1-17
 - Day 2: Romans 1:18-32
 - Day 3: Romans 2:1-16
 - Day 4: Romans 2:17—3:8
 - Day 5: Romans 3:9-31
 - Day 6: Romans 4:1-25
 - Day 7: Romans 5:1-11
2. Do an Internet search on the terms *righteousness, justification, and sanctification*. Sort your results and assemble a one-sheet summary. Consider photocopying this summary to share with your group at the next session.
3. Watch the movie *Babette's Feast* (MGM, 1988). Where do you see grace? How do the characters respond to grace?



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For Further Reading

Available from www.augsburgfortress.org/store:

Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part 1: Chapters 1–8 by N. T. Wright.
Provides a guide to the first half of Romans and the author's
translation of the Scripture text.