

### Reading Schedule for September 18-24, 2017

This is the heart of the Gospel. There is no more thorough presentation of the implications of the Gospel, as it declares us righteous in God's sight through faith. Not one of us deserves it, so it is given as a gift. But it doesn't end there; before we end the week, we will begin to talk about how the Gospel changes us. A gospel that is received is a gospel that is lived out. The theological words are justification and sanctification. Our main focus this week will be to understand how we are justified in the sight of God.

**September 18 – Romans 3:1-20:** "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin." (v.20) This verse culminates this whole section. Hardly anyone would say that we are all unrighteous – no one is good at all. Most of the time, the message we hear in our world is that we are all good and that everyone is special. I know they are emphasizing the image of God, but we know that the image has been smeared by sin. Each one of us sins. We will read that fact tomorrow. How do we know that no one is righteous – not even one? We realize that the law was given to show us that we could never match up. To be called righteous is to fulfill the law completely. Only Jesus did that. Without Jesus, we are hopeless. The law condemns us. This is a powerful truth and worthy of reflection. How do you respond to this amazing reading today?

**September 19 – Romans 3:21-31:** ". . . and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." (v.24) I know that is not a complete sentence, but it uses the word "justified" which I wanted to emphasize. We do not receive the righteousness of Christ because we deserve it; we are given his righteousness through grace. This is all activated when we trust Christ, who died in our place. His sacrifice of atonement is the key for our salvation. We become participants through faith. The word "justified" is used several times in this section. How do you understand the theological term justification? Why is that so significant? Martin Luther said it was the main concept in the whole New Testament. Why might that be true?

**September 20 – Romans 4:1-15:** "Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness." (vv. 4 & 5) This is the explanation of "justified by faith." Jesus offers us salvation as a gift because he loves us, not because we have earned it through our powerful faith. You understand faith to be acceptance of this wonderful gift of salvation and you are right in your understanding. Abraham is used as an example because he was in relationship with God before the law was given. Abraham must have surrendered himself to God's mercy and grace because that would be his only hope. What stood out to you in these words about Abraham's faith?

**September 21 – Romans 4:16-25:** "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." (v.25) I wanted to pick a verse that summarized what the Apostle Paul is trying to teach through this section. I think these are the words. When we believe, an exchange takes place; we give Christ our sins and he gives us his righteousness and forgiveness. There is nothing we

can do to earn this. Only through Christ can we receive God's righteousness. This simple statement concludes this section very well. What highlights would you emphasize in these verses? I recall Abraham's faith in sacrificing his son from Genesis 22. He believed that even if he would sacrifice his son, God could raise him up from the dead. Abraham had a very profound faith.

**September 22 – Romans 5:1-11:** "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (v.1) I think it is amazing to describe my relationship with God as being secured in peace. The Bible teaches that we are all hostile towards God; our sin separates us from God; we are selfish to the core. But now, through faith, we are brought into a peaceful relationship with God. Peace with God means that we have been reconciled with him. There is no more hostility between us; no sin blocking our relationship with him. Peace with God is possible only because Jesus paid the price for our sins through his death on the cross. These words are words that lead to worship. This is a marvelous section of truth that emphasizes our hope and God's marvelous love. What do you notice?

**September 23 – Romans 5:12-21:** "The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (vv. 20 & 21) I appreciate what the [Life Application Bible](#) says: "As a sinner, separated from God, you see his law from below, as a ladder to be climbed to get to God. Perhaps you have repeatedly tried to climb it, only to fall to the ground every time you have advanced one or two rungs. Or perhaps the sheer height of the ladder seems so overwhelming that you have never even started up. In either case, what relief you should feel to see Jesus offering with open arms to lift you above the ladder of the law, to take you directly to God." I thought that was a great illustration, and one I wanted to include in your thoughts for today. Grace is described as being bigger than any of your sin or sins. I am thankful for that because I have many sins. We will learn that sin is inevitable, but also, God wants to empower us to sin less. Nonetheless, we are held secure in Christ's loving arms. How do you respond to this reading today?

**September 24 – Romans 6:1-14:** "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." (v.11) This is a verse that always gets my attention. Because of our union and identification with Christ, we are no longer obligated to carry out those old motives, desires and goals. We have had a new start and our journey does not have to include sin. In verse 13 we learn about being instruments of righteousness, empowered by God. This is the section where we begin to transition into what God can do in your life and my life because of his presence abiding in my heart. The Holy Spirit dwells within. What does it mean to you to be alive in Christ? Even though the Holy Spirit isn't mentioned, how does he make you alive?

**Prayers: Pray for our next high school director, as God has led us to pursue a part-time position to lead and minister to our High School students.**