

Review: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

NOTE: In last week's lesson we studied what must have been to Paul "the bitter problem of Israel's unbelief"...Israel's failure to recognize the Messiah to whom she gave birth that puts into question all the other privileges and gives rise to this entire discussion. This brings us to the central issue: where Israel's failure with respect to the gospel leaves the validity of God's original word...(Paul) is preaching that the divine privileges (especially divine filiation) are not removed from Israel but that her way to them is roundabout and wholly dependent upon an eschatological exercise of God's creative power and mercy. *Sacra Pagina*
Paul continues to describe God in a way which may seem foreign to us, but would have been a common form of Hebrew argumentation. *Commentary*

DAY ONE

Read Romans 9:19-21

1. As today's lesson begins, Paul continues his argument regarding God's mercy, complete freedom, and sovereignty. What questions does Paul's imaginary questioner ask in verse 19?
2. Read one of the following verses and note any similarity(ties) to verse 19.

Wisdom 12:12

Job 9:19

3. Paul continues by answering his questions with more questions. Complete verse 20.

But who indeed are you, a human being,

Will what is molded say to the one who molds it,

NOTE: Paul's point here is that God is not answerable to human beings. Creatures can claim no right to interrogate the creator about the wisdom of his ways. Audacity of this sort rises from a pride that forgets who God is in relation to the world he has made. *Hahn and Mitch*

4. The questions Paul poses in verse 20 are not new. The Christians of Paul's day, and believers throughout the ages, have at some time questioned God: "Why are your people born with imperfections, limitations, and disabilities?" While there is no simple answer, share some thoughts.

5. Paul then presents an interesting imagery. He sees God as a potter or sculptor with us as his clay. What point does Paul make using this analogy in verse 21?

6. CONNECTION: It is not difficult for us to envision Paul's metaphor of a potter and clay. Most of us worked with clay at some time (think back to grade school and the ugly pottery we made that were kept as treasures). "God, like the village potter, turns and shapes the clay as he desires, forming a whole range of vessels from cups to bowls to jars to pitchers and so on." (*Hahn and Mitch*) Most of us are not perfect earthen vessels, but "cracked pots," blemished by love, loss, sin and time. And yet, God sees us as worthwhile, even with our cracks. Can you see blessedness in the cracks in your "pot" that have occurred over your lifetime? Share some thoughts with your small group.

Record 2 Corinthians 4:7 and begin your prayer today grateful for God's creation of you and all around you.

DAY TWO

Read Romans 9:22-26

7. Paul continues by posing a "what if" statement (but does not give us a "then"). If we presume that his "then" follows his previous thought that God can "assign different roles to different persons in implementing the designs of history" (*Hahn and Mitch*), then the verses are less confusing. Complete verses 22-24:

What if God, desiring to show his wrath,
has endured with much patience the objects of wrath
and what if he has done so
for the objects of mercy,
including us whom he has called,

NOTE: For better understanding, consult Msgr. Mikesch's very good comments on these verses. You may also wish to refer to other translations (such as the NABRE).

8. Paul knows that the Roman community is made up of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. He wants his readers to know that this message is not just for the Jews. In verse 24 how does he express this?

9. In verse 25 Paul uses a quote from the prophet Hosea. The beginning of this quote says, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” What message do you think Paul is trying to convey to and about the Jewish people?

10. To the Jewish people a person’s name symbolized the very essence of the person. To change from being called “beloved” to “unbeloved” is significant. Refer to the Commentary and record what this name change Paul alludes to could signify.

11. In verse 26 Paul continues to quote Hosea: “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they shall be called children of the living God.” How does Msgr. Mikesch explain Paul’s contention that God’s word has not failed?

12. CONNECTION: In today’s passages we see Paul trying to convince the Roman Christians that they need to be united ... Jews and Gentiles...as God’s people. By showing them God’s ability to transform lives from “not my people” to “my people”, the diverse Christian community could convert from their traditional religious identities and become one in Christ. In what ways have you witnessed God’s transforming work in yourself or in another’s life, or in the world? What differences were you able to see?

We should remember that it is ultimately God who moves hearts. Pray today that God continues to change your heart for the better each day.

*Lord who is hope, who is bread and water, who is help and healing, who is freedom, and who is love, transform me anew, and so keep me close to you, as you transform the world.
Amen (prayer courtesy of Catholic Relief Services)*

DAY THREE
Read Romans 9:27-29

13. We begin today's study with Paul again quoting the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). Remembering that Paul is addressing the Jewish Christians, why do you think he continues to quote the Hebrew Scriptures? What effect might this have?

14a. Read and note any similarities in concept you find in Romans 9:27 and Isaiah 10:22.

b. According to Isaiah who among the Israelites will be saved?

15. According to verse 28 of today's passage and the end of Isaiah 10:22, what are the consequences for the rest of Israel?

16. In verse 29 Paul quotes Isaiah 1:9 to point out once more how only a remnant of the chosen people were saved. Refer to the Commentary and record Msgr. Mikesch's restatement of this verse, which makes it much more understandable.

17. In verse 29 Paul compares the fate of the "remnant" to that of Sodom and Gomorrah, a story familiar to his Jewish audience. From your memory of this story in Genesis 19, briefly note what happened to those cities and why.

18. CONNECTION: These passages show us that God did not guarantee salvation to all the Jews. Only a "remnant" was prophesied to be faithful to the end. We know that God wants all to be saved, yet he has given us free will to choose him or reject him. We do not believe "once saved, always saved;" nor do we believe that God has predestined anyone inevitably to evil. What is most important is that we continue to choose God in faith and obedience. Describe how you could put faith and obedience into your actions every day.

Saint Augustine, reflecting on this passage, exhorts us to pray each day for perseverance in obedience to our Father in heaven. Let this exhortation lead you into prayer.

DAY FOUR
Read Romans 9:30-33

19. According to verse 30 what have the Gentiles attained and how did they come to receive this gift?

20. In verse 31 Paul returns to his argument that salvation may not be attained simply by strictly following the law of Moses (which he examined in chapters 2 and 3). What kind of righteousness did the Jews strive to achieve?

21. According to verse 32 why were they not able to achieve righteousness in this way?

22a. Verse 33 is made up of quotations from Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16. Read and record Isaiah 28:16. How does the last sentence in Isaiah 28:16 differ from the last phrase of Romans 9:33?

b. How could Jesus be a stumbling stone?

23. In Isaiah 28:16 Jesus is referred to as a “precious cornerstone.” How is Jesus a “precious cornerstone” to you?

24. CONNECTION: In Matthew 21:42 Jesus quotes from Psalms 118:22-23 and applies the imagery to himself. We read in this psalm:

*The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.*

These are the verses on which The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study was founded. The cornerstone of a building is the foundational stone. It provides a solid base on which to build the rest of the building. What impact has The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study had in your life?

Prayerfully reread Psalms 118:22-23. Let this thought and your gratitude lead you into prayer.

DAY FIVE

Read Romans 10:1-3

25. Today we begin chapter 10. Record Paul's heartfelt prayer in verse 1. (Good memory verse)

26. We often hear the word “saved.” Paul prays that his people may be saved. While we all know the essence of the word, we often forget that the name “Jesus” in Hebrew means “God saves” (*CCC 430*). Read and record Titus 3:4-5.

27. In verse 2, Paul affirms that his Jewish people do have a zeal for God, but they are not enlightened. The biblical meaning of enlightened means to “give light to the soul.” How do you think that applies in this verse?

28. The word “light” can refer to different kinds of illumination, or an emotion revealed in the eyes, or even to set something on fire or a weight that isn’t heavy. Each of those definitions could apply to enlightenment of our souls. Choose one and explain how it could be applied.

29. In verse 3 Paul says that the Jews are “ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God’s righteousness.” How would you rephrase this sentence in your own words?

30. CONNECTION: In today’s verses we learned that the Jews who rejected Christ sought “to establish their own righteousness.” We, too, often want to decide what is right for us rather than be guided by Christ. Obedience to God versus our own sense of righteousness can be challenging. St. Josemaria Escriva said: “God does not impose a blind obedience on us. He wants us to obey intelligently and we have to feel responsible for helping others with the intelligence we do have. But let’s be sincere with ourselves: let’s examine, in every case, whether it is love for the truth which moves us or selfishness and attachment to our own judgment.” What practical advice can you offer to help discern the difference?

Read the words spoken by God’s people in Exodus 24:7 and write a prayer asking the Lord for an obedient spirit.

DAY SIX
Read Romans 10:4-5

31. In verse 4 Paul says, “For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”

Msgr. Mikesch notes that scholars differ on the meaning of this verse. Refer to the Commentary and briefly summarize the different approaches to understanding Christ as the “end of the law.”

32. Consider Paul’s use of the word “everyone.” How might this have been interpreted by his readers of that time?

NOTE: Tertullian, an early Church scholar (born 150 A.D.), wrote: “Alone among all animate beings, man can boast of having been counted worthy to receive a law from God: as an animal endowed with reason, capable of understanding and discernment, he is to govern his conduct by using his freedom and reason, in obedience to the One who has entrusted everything to him.” (as noted in the CCC 1951)

33. In keeping with his practice of connecting his people to the Hebrew Scriptures, today Paul speaks of Moses. Of what does Moses write according to the beginning of verse 5?

34. The quotation from the end of verse 5 is from Leviticus 18:5. Paul interprets it to mean that the Jews believe that if a person could totally fulfill the law, that person would achieve righteousness. Refer back to Romans 7:14-19. From your understanding of Paul’s contention, what is the problem with the concept of totally fulfilling the law to achieve righteousness?

35. We often hear the phrase “righteous living.” Think of an example of a person, living or deceased, who represents making an effort to live righteously. Describe why you chose this person.

36. CONNECTION: “Historically, with only a few exceptions, patristic and medieval writers understood Romans 10:4 as a statement about the unity of the Bible, revealed in Christ, not about the expiration of some or all of the Mosaic commandments.” (*Hahn & Mitch*) Rather than being an end in and of themselves, the Ten Commandments are signposts pointing the way to Christ. Christ is a role model for living our lives righteously and lovingly. Through grace, we can continue to strive to live righteously - to be men and women who live for the glory of God. In what ways do you give God glory by serving him and his people?

The noble motto of the Jesuits, attributed to St. Ignatius, is "Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam" (AMDG), or "For the Greater Glory of God." AMDG is the belief that all our actions can give glory to God if done with the intent of giving glory. Let these thoughts lead you into prayer.

Read pages 73-77 in the Commentary by Rev. Msgr. Gregory R. Mikesch, M.Div., M.A. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, Catholic Edition. Copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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