

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

THINK: In Romans 3:27-31 Paul is emphasizing that the interior law is built on faith and faith is the gift of God that leads to justification...We Catholics see faith and works as inseparable...two sides of the same coin. For a good explanation on the relationship between faith and works, read St. James' teaching on faith and works in James, chapter 2. *Agape Bible Study: Romans Chapter 3, "Faith and the Judgment of God"*

DAY ONE

Read Romans 3:29–31

1. As today's passage opens, Paul continues to address the Jewish people through his imaginary opposition. According to verse 29, with what are they struggling?
2. Why would it be so difficult for Paul's Jewish readers to accept this?
3. Carefully read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. This is the most important Jewish prayer and is called the Shema. How does Paul incorporate this prayer into verse 30 of today's passage?
4. In verse 31 Paul imagines the Jewish people asking if the law is totally useless. How does Paul respond and what is his conclusion?
5. Paul cannot accept the law as a means of salvation, but he can accept the law as revealing something else. See our Commentary to determine what the law *can* reveal.
6. **CONNECTION:** Chapter 3 opened asking "Then what advantage has the Jew" and closed asking "Do we then overthrow the law with this faith," with the answer being "By no means." In between, Paul argues the balance between the law and faith. While we know that we are saved by faith, it is the law which God has given to us that tells us how to live.

We “keep” the law not out of fear but out of love. Give an example of a “law” and how in keeping it you rest in God’s love.

Read Deuteronomy 26:17-19. Let the words of God’s covenant lift your heart as you begin to pray.

DAY TWO

Read Romans 4:1-2

7. As today’s lesson begins, Paul once again poses a question. Explain what you think he is asking and whether you think this is a rhetorical question or a literal one.

8. The Jews thought of Abraham as their father in the flesh—the “forebear in faith and founding patriarch of the covenant people.” (*Hahn*) As Christians, we also consider Abraham the father of our faith. Read Matthew 1:1-17 and briefly note why we believe this to be true.

Note: The Church calls the patriarch Abraham “our father in faith.” She does this to underscore the continuity that exists between the old and new covenants. Abraham accepted as true God’s limitless promise. The righteousness bestowed upon Abraham achieves its definitive exposition in the supreme holiness of Jesus Christ. *Excerpted from “Praying with Saint Paul,” Edited by Fr. Peter John Cameron, O.P.*

9. According to verse 2 Paul says that Abraham might be justified by his works. Refer to our Commentary and identify the words that Msgr. Mikesch adds to “works” to clarify the meaning. How does Msgr. suggest Paul may be using this phrase?

10. In verse 3 Paul introduces a scriptural quote by posing a rhetorical question. (A rhetorical question is one that requires no answer, but causes a person to stop and think.) Have you used that method in trying to teach or convince someone? If you have done so, briefly explain why it did or did not work.

11. At the end of verse 2, Paul says that even if Abraham has works to boast about, he should not do so before God. Using our assumption that faith must come before works, how does this help to explain Paul’s statement?

NOTE: Our Catechism says “without faith it is impossible to please (God) and to attain the fellowship of his Son.” *CCC 16*

12. CONNECTION: Abraham's decisions affected the lives of many people who came after him and had a great impact on the world. We know that there are consequences to any action we take. What we do today can set into motion events that will continue for years to come. Give an example of this from your own life, briefly describing the effects of a decision, large or small, you have made along the way.

Read Proverbs 3:5-6 and write a prayer today seeking God's guidance as you make daily decisions.

DAY THREE

Read Romans 4:3-4

Before you begin today's questions, it may be helpful to review Genesis 12:1-6 and Genesis 15.

13a. As today's lesson begins, Paul once again continues his debate with his implied audience by quoting Genesis 15:6. Record verse 3.

b. Comment on what you think "by the righteousness of Abraham" means.

NOTE: Reckoned: In secular Greek, the verb *logizomai* is a business term for recording credits and debits. It can also be translated "counted". When Paul stresses that righteousness is booked to our credit as a gift, he does not imply that the gift is merely imputed to the believer in an external way. In his mind, the divine record corresponds to reality, that is, we are *counted* righteous because we are *made* righteous in Christ. *Ignatius Study Bible*

14. "This text in Genesis (15:6) supports Paul's argument by making the link between faith and being found righteous in God's eyes. God reckoned Abraham's faith as something which deserved to be rewarded. It is faith that leads to justification and justification renders a believer's good works God's works and meritorious of eternal life." *Agape*

Do you think this means that righteousness comes through faith, or good works, or both? (You may also refer to *CCC 2008*.)

15. Why do you think Paul is using Abraham as an example in his message to the Jewish Christians in Rome?

16. According to verse 4 when people work, they can expect to receive payment because they have earned the money; it is due them. There is a great difference between what can be earned and a gift. What are some characteristics of a gift?

17. Refer to the Commentary and record why Msgr. Mikesch says that God counted Abraham's action as righteousness.

18. CONNECTION: In today's lesson, St. Paul uses the verses from Genesis to teach his audience about Abraham's great faith. In faith, Abraham responded to God's call to go to an unfamiliar place and there he would be blessed. We, too, sometimes must leave one place where we are safe and secure for a place that is new and unfamiliar. Describe a time when you faced an unknown future with God's help – perhaps moving to a new home, a new job, a new relationship. How did your faith help you accept the change, and in what way(s) were you blessed in that new situation? Record some details.

Read and record Micah 6:8. Let thoughts of what God asks of you lead you into prayer.

DAY FOUR

Read Romans 4:5-8

19. In yesterday's lesson we identified those who work as those who receive payment due. Today's lesson begins with verse 5. Complete the verse and identify who is speaking:

But to one who

trusts him who

such faith is

20. In verse 6, Paul brings King David into the discussion. From your knowledge, share a few facts about David? If you would like to read about David, his story is found primarily in 1 Samuel 16:31 and 2 Samuel 1:23.

21. Paul goes on to quote David from Psalms 32:1-2 saying that a person to whom, apart from works, God reckons righteousness, is blessed. The word "blessed" can be translated as "fortunate" or "favored by God". Read Matthew 5:3-11.

As you read the words of Jesus, think of substituting the word “fortunate” for “blessed.” List one or more of the benefits received by those who are “blessed.”

22. Verses 7 and 8 are from Psalm 32:1-2; however, in the Psalm itself (NRSVCE translation) the word “happy” is used in place of “blessed.” According to the psalmist why are the people “happy” or “blessed?”

23. Read and record a verse from one of the following of David’s psalms which also celebrate the blessing of righteousness in the Lord:

Psalm 1:1-3

Psalm 84:11-12

Psalm 119:1-2

24. CONNECTION: Today Paul focused on the blessing of God for forgiveness of sins. In our Catholic Church, the Sacrament of Penance can bring us the grace of forgiveness. True contrition through this sacrament reconciles us to God and the Church, gives us peace of conscience and spiritual consolation and restores grace and blessings to our lives. *(CCC 1496)* Do you consider yourself or someone you know to be blessed, fortunate or happy? Record some thoughts to share with your group.

Read and record Psalm 51:7. Let the thoughts this passage evokes lead you into prayer.

DAY FIVE

Read Romans 4:9-11

25. At the beginning of verse 9 Paul speaks of “this blessedness.” Re-read verses 7-8 from yesterday’s passage and record to what “this blessedness” refers.

26. In today’s study Paul continues to focus on the importance which the Jews placed on circumcision as a sign of following the “law.” What question does Paul ask in verse 9?

27. In verse 10 Paul reminds his Jewish readers that Abraham was reckoned as righteous before he was circumcised; therefore, circumcision is not what caused Abraham's righteousness. According to the first sentence of verse 11, of what was Abraham's circumcision a sign?

28. The second sentence of verse 11 tells us why Abraham's circumcision came in a particular order. What was the purpose of making Abraham the ancestor of all uncircumcised believers?

29. Refer to our Commentary regarding verse 11, in which Msgr. Mikesch states that Paul is once again addressing the question "Who is the real Jew?" Briefly summarize Msgr. Mikesch's analysis of Paul's answer.

30. CONNECTION: Today's verses reiterate the fact that people do not earn rewards from God simply by performing a ritual. Though circumcision was a ritual established by God, alone it is not enough. The rituals or ceremonies that any of us perform are outward signs that represent an inner belief. Our Sacraments are outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace. Choose one sacrament that you have received and explain how God's grace, outwardly signed through that ritual, changed you in some way large or small or brought you into a closer relationship with God.

Read and record Acts 20:32. Thanking God for the grace that comes through the sacraments to empower you to live a life of faith, begin your prayer.

DAY SIX
Read Romans 4:12-15

31. As today's lesson begins, we see in verse 12 that Abraham is also the ancestor of the circumcised. What additional requirement or condition besides circumcision is imposed on them?

32. With verse 12 Paul is shattering the preconceived notions of his Jewish readers with regard to what it means to be Jewish. Explain in your own words what you understand his words to mean.

33. In today's study, Paul again confirms that God's promise to Abraham and his descendants to inherit the world did not come through the law (verse 13). Where did the promise come from?

34. After referring to the Commentary, briefly explain the premise that Paul suggests according to verse 14.

35. In verse 15 Paul states that "For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation." Reread Romans 3:21-24 and record verse 24.

THINK: How then can anyone be saved? Only if God takes the initiative...Recognition and acceptance of this extraordinary gift is grace, and precisely the same faith is required of Jews and Gentiles. Jerome Murphy O'Connor, Paul, His Story

36. CONNECTION: Msgr. Mikesch ends this week's Commentary with this statement: "In this new relationship with God, based on God's merciful love, there is no fear of his wrath for not fulfilling the law. In the new relationship, God has promised his forgiveness. We are called to respond in love." Paul has confirmed that we ALL are sinners. He is not directing us to ignore God's commands; rather, to be obedient and to love God as Christ loves us. Think about what it means for you to love God and in what ways you can show God your love for him. Share some thoughts with your small group.

Read Galatians 3:23-26 and record verse 26. Let the thoughts this passage evokes lead you into prayer.

Read pages 27-31 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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