

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE ROMANS

Lesson 16 – Study Questions

Romans 11:25-12:8

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

NOTE: At the end of last week’s lesson, Paul expressed his hope for Israel in the analogy of the grafting of the olive tree. If the natural branches are grafted back onto the tree, there must still be life in them. “Nowhere is it clearer in the New Testament that the Lord is not finished with Israel in fulfilling his purposes than in Romans 11; rather, Paul advocates a *theology of incorporation* in which Gentiles are given access to the rich sap that runs through Israel from root to branch. *Hahn & Mitch*

DAY ONE

Read Romans 11:25-26

1. Paul cautions the Gentile Christians saying, “I want you to understand this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not claim to be wiser than you are.” What sinful quality might be indicated by “claiming to be wiser than they are”?

THINK: Sometimes we too may offer this same kind of caution to our family or friends. Can you think of an example of when you might tactfully say “Perhaps you don’t have all the information” and how this advice might be helpful to them?

2. Can you determine why we know in this section that the “brothers and sisters” are Gentiles?

3. At the end of verse 25 Paul describes the mystery that he wants the Gentiles to understand. This mystery has three parts. The first is that “a hardening has come upon a part of Israel.” What do you think the hardening represents? (Look back at Romans 11:7-8 for a hint.)

NOTE: Paul holds that Israel’s temporary rejection of Jesus is providentially ordered to the salvation of the Gentiles. Similarly, he teaches that the salvation of the Gentiles is providentially ordered to the ultimate salvation of Israel in Christ. (Pay particular attention to the word **providential**, meaning “divine foresight or planning”. Salvation is a grace from God).

Israel’s sin is used to save the sinful Gentiles, and the faith of the Gentiles is the means of Israel’s salvation. The interconnectedness of the human race in both sin and salvation – a theme that has dominated Paul’s thought in Romans – is summed up and then celebrated in this passage. *Hahn & Shea*

4. The second part of the mystery is stated at the end of verse 25: “until the full number of Gentiles has come in.” Scholars differ on the meaning of this phrase, some interpreting this as “Israel’s hardening will remain so long as the Gentile mission of the Church is under way.” (*Hahn & Mitch*) What does Msgr. Mikesch say regarding God’s will in this?

5. The third part of the mystery is that “all Israel will be saved.” This phrase echoes the prophecies of the Old Testament, including Isaiah 59:20, which Paul quotes in verse 26. Record this quote.

NOTE: “Israel” (versus the term “Jews”) is used by Paul 11 times in Chapters 9-11. According to some, Paul is talking about *spiritual Israel*, that is, the Church made up of Jews and Gentiles converted to Christianity. According to others, Paul envisions the salvation of *ethnic* Jews, either

from every generation or from the last generation of history. It is more likely, however, that “all Israel” is a reference to *ethnic* Israel, that is, the assembly of faithful Israelites from all twelve tribes down through the ages. In other words, Paul is thinking of the whole nation of covenant people descended from the twelve sons of the patriarch Jacob (renamed Israel, Gen. 32:28) *Ignatius Study Bible*

6. CONNECTION: Paul continues to preach of God’s awesome power and providence, just as he continues to encourage our humility and discourage the kind of pride which may lead us to believe that we are wiser than God or totally understanding of his plans. Our Catechism describes pride as one of the 7 capital sins and yet there are different types of pride. There is a proper esteem we should have for ourselves, knowing that we are made in the image of God and that every soul has value. “Good” pride is rooted in an appreciation for the gifts we have received from God. Using an example from your life experiences, what kind of pride do you think is a good pride versus a sinful one?

Read and record 1 Corinthians 1:30 and begin your prayer today humbly grateful for God’s wisdom.

DAY TWO

Read Romans 11:27-29

7. As today’s lesson begins, Paul continues to quote from Isaiah. What word does Msgr. Mikesch note that Paul has inserted?

8. Read Jeremiah 31:31-33. What similarities do you see between the Jeremiah verses and the quotation in verse 27?

9. In verse 28, what do you think Paul means when he says that the Jews are the “enemies of God” for the sake of the Gentiles? (Refer back to verses 25-26)

10. According to the end of verse 28 why are the Jews still loved by God?

NOTE: Paul’s reasoning is based on the logic of the covenant. In the biblical view, covenants create families by establishing bonds of kinship that endure through time. This means that a covenant can never be revoked, only enforced. Faithful partners joined in covenant can expect to enjoy its blessings, while an unfaithful partner faces the prospect of its curses...Because God’s love for Israel endures, the covenant with Israel endures. But because the covenant with Israel has been renewed through the Messiah, and many have refused to be a part of it, the disciplinary sanctions of the covenant are put into effect. So it is that unbelieving Israel is “hardened” (11:7) and “beloved” (11:28) at the same time. *Hahn & Mitch*

11. Read and record verse 29 and consider how this verse applies to your own life. (Good memory verse)

12. CONNECTION: The confidence which Paul expresses in today's verses is rooted in his deep trust of the covenant between God and his chosen people. Pope John Paul II once said, “The Jewish people are the chosen and beloved people of God, the people of God’s covenant which contains God’s faithfulness and is never broken and is still alive.” God maintains his love of the Jews because of his promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This gift of love is

irrevocable. We see this type of generational love often when we love a son or daughter of a person who we know, love and respect. In what way have you seen this in your own life?

Read and record 2 Corinthians 6:18. Aware that you are a child of God and loved because of that, begin your prayer.

DAY THREE

Read Romans 11:30-32

13a. Msgr. Mikesch tells us that the logic of today's verses is not easy to follow. Perhaps the first thing to do is to establish who the "you" and "they" are in verses 31 and 32.

"you"

"they"

b. In connection with verse 30, how could the disobedience of the Jews have led to the mercy shown the Gentiles? (Refer to the paraphrasing in the Commentary.)

14. In verse 31 "they" refers to "unbelieving Israel." According to this verse, what does Paul say will be the outcome for Israel?

15. In the gospels Jesus relates many parables which describe the mercy of God. Name one or more of the parables that you can recall which show God's mercy. (Many of Jesus' parables can be found in Luke, chapters 13-18.)

16. Of the parables that you listed above, which one speaks to you most clearly of God's mercy and why?

17. According to verse 32, "...God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all." In what way(s) do you think disobedience can be a form of imprisonment?

NOTE: The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible interprets verse 32 as follows: "God allows all to sin that all might taste salvation. His saving plan moves forward despite man's rebellion."

18. CONNECTION: Throughout this Letter to the Romans, Paul has shown us that whenever God shows mercy to one group, another group shares in the blessing. In this week's study, we see that "In God's design, Israel's unbelief is being used to grant the light of faith to the Gentiles. Meanwhile, Israel remains dear to God, still the object of special providence, the mystery of which will one day be revealed." (*USCCB*) Recall a time when you have seen evidence of similar interdependence, that is, one person (or group) receives God's mercy and another person (or group) is consequently blessed.

Read and record Job 35:8. You too are closely connected with others in your life. Your words, choices and actions have a rippling effect on the people around you. Let these thoughts lead you into prayer.

DAY FOUR

Read Romans 11:33-36

19a. Today's beautiful verses include what is often called "The Final Hymn and Doxology." What is the meaning of the word "Doxology"? Can you share an example?

b. At the beginning of verse 33, what does Paul recognize?

20. In verse 33 Paul shares a truth that we tend to forget, as we strive to understand all that happens in our lives. Record Paul's words.

21. Paul quotes Isaiah 40:13 in verse 34 to show that no one can fully comprehend God's ways. In your own words, what does Isaiah say?

22. In verse 35 Paul references Job 35:7. How does this verse connect to Paul's thoughts in verses 33-35 of today's reading?

23. Verse 36 is the final doxology of this major section of Paul's letter. What key thought is Paul expressing in these words? Record the verse. (Good memory verse)

NOTE: Call it a hymn, call it a lyrical poem; either way, the Apostle marvels at the genius and generosity of God that shines through the “mystery” revealed in 11:25-26 and the “mercy” promised to all in 11:32. “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!” The divine wisdom cannot be searched to the bottom. Only the Spirit can fathom the limitless reaches of God’s infinite mind (1 Cor 2:10). *Hahn & Mitch*

24. CONNECTION: We are all absolutely dependent on God. He is the source of all things. He is the power that sustains us and he rules the entire world around us. Everything we have comes from God. He is totally self-sufficient and needs nothing from us. Nevertheless, there are things we can give him. In appreciation for all that God is and all that he has given you, what are some of the gifts you would like to give him in return?

As the old Baltimore Catechism says, “God made me to know him, to love him, and to serve him in this world, and to be happy with him forever in heaven.” Let your prayer today be another gift to God.

NOTE: As we look back over the Letter of Paul to the Romans Chapters 1-11, it is important to remember that Paul was writing this letter without having visited the Roman Christians in person (or really understanding what their problems were). What we have read so far shows us a brilliant and compelling approach to sharing the Word, particularly “Salvation in Christ” (1:16-8-39) and the “Restoration of Israel” (9:1-11:36). *Ignatius Study Bible*

As we approach Chapters 12-14, it appears that Paul has been made aware of some of the more practical problems agitating the church in Rome. The final chapters are a practical application of the theology expounded in earlier chapters. This final section is often entitled “Christian Living.” *Ignatius Study Bible*

DAY FIVE

Read Romans 12:1-3

25. Paul has just finished telling his readers how merciful God is to all people in chapter 11. According to verse 1 of chapter 12 what is Paul asking the people to do in return?

NOTE: We live out our offering of self to God in the ordinary circumstances of our lives. Our self-offering is something we do not only in church but outside of church. Thus our work, recreation, shopping, and whatever else we do becomes worship – “spiritual worship” (12:1) – if we offer it to God and live it in the Spirit. True worship is to return our lives to God in thanks. *Perotta*

26. Paul considers these sacrifices to be our “spiritual worship.” Share an example of “spiritual worship” that you have offered this week?

27. Complete verse 2: (Good memory verse)

Do not be

but be

so that you may

what is good and

NOTE: One of the best ways to meditate upon God’s Word is through memorization! *Hahn & Shea*

28. What specific directive does Paul give in verse 3 for each of us to follow?

29. Why do you think this particular command would be important for the members of the Church in Rome (and for us as members of our own parish churches) to follow?

30. CONNECTION: A person's life can seem empty and without direction if that life is not lived in accord with the will of God. Paul tells us: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God..." To do that, we must discern God's will for us. Sometimes the will of God is very easy to discern; at other times it can be difficult. In what way(s) do you judge that you are following his will? Or how do you assess if you are following his will?

Read and record the first phrase of John 16:13. Pray for the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit knows God's will.

NOTE: Saint Therese of Lisieux realized as she matured that it was unlikely that God would give her the martyrdom that she dreamed about. In her maturity, she began to see that her day to day life was the martyrdom, i.e. the witness that God desired of her. The way she would offer herself to God would not be according to her own plan, but according to God's; only in this way is the offering true. The big moments of life tend not to be the ones that wear us down. Even great tragedies sometimes bring about the best in us. What wears us down is the day to day and the hour to hour. In union with Therese let us offer our day-to-day lives as a living sacrifice, that the ordinary may be a place where his extraordinary Presence is revealed. *Cameron*

DAY SIX

Read Romans 12:4-8

31. In verse 4 Paul speaks of our physical bodies. What conclusion does he reach about its members at the end of the verse?

THINK: Consider some of the many ministries in your church (or in The Cornerstone) that must be filled by different members.

32. Msgr. Mikesch notes in verse 5 that Paul says we are “one body in Christ,” while in 1 Corinthians 12:27, he says that we are “the body of Christ.” According to the Commentary, what does this emphasize?

33. In verses 4-5 Paul also compares the members of the body of Christ to our human bodies. How would you explain this analogy?

34. How would you relate the interdependence of the members of the body to Paul’s earlier discussion about the relationship between Jews and Gentiles?

35. In the last phrase of verse 6 and in verses 7-8, Paul lists seven gifts which are to be used for the good of the community. Choose one or two, and beside each write a brief phrase to describe a specific way in which it could be used to build up the Church or build up The Cornerstone.

Prophecy

Ministry

Teaching
Encouraging
Giving
Leading
Compassion

36. CONNECTION: Paul says that we are one body in Christ and through his grace, each of us, his members, has received gifts to build up his body, the Church. It is human nature for us to take credit for the gifts and talents we have been given by God, but this can lead to disharmony among the members. Just as the human body suffers when its members don't work together, the Body of Christ suffers when its members don't work together harmoniously. The body of believers is strengthened whenever the gifts of the Spirit are allowed to manifest themselves. God wants you to use your gifts for the sake of his kingdom. List the gifts that you believe God has given you and how each can be used to build up and strengthen the Body of Christ.

Read and record the last sentence of 1 Corinthians 7:7. Pray for the wisdom to recognize the gifts he has given you and the humility to recognize that they truly are "gifts from God" to be used for the good of his people.

Read pages 88-94 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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