

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE ROMANS

Lesson 15 – Study Questions

Romans 11:5-11:24

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

NOTE: In last week’s lesson we began Romans chapter 11, in which Paul posed the theoretical question “Has God rejected his people?” He continues to expand on his answer (“By no means!”) by comparing the Old Testament example of the 7,000 (mentioned in 1 Kings 19:10) and the “remnant” of believers in Elijah’s time (8th Century B.C.) with the Jewish Christians who have accepted the Gospel. For Paul, the Elijah episode is layered with significance. (1) Typologically, it points to a recurring pattern in salvation history. The crisis of faith in Paul’s day mirrors the crisis of faith in Elijah’s day. At both times Israel resists the Lord and his plan on a national scale, with only a few remaining faithful. (2) Pastorally, Paul wants to caution readers lest they conclude as Elijah did that the Israel of faith has dwindled to nothing. *Hahn & Mitch*

In chapter 11 Paul continues for a while to defend “God’s faithfulness to Israel by pointing to the existence of the Jewish Christian ‘remnant’ whom God has clearly not rejected.” This still leaves the question of the remainder, whom God has “hardened.” Gradually throughout this chapter Paul reveals the ‘mystery’ that holds out hope for the salvation of all Israel on the basis of an all-embracing, inclusive operation of God’s mercy. *Sacra Pagina*

DAY ONE

Read Romans 11:5-8

1. As today’s lesson opens, we continue with the section entitled (NRSV) “Israel’s Rejection is Not Final.” Paul returns in today’s verses to two of his favorite themes - election by God and God’s omnipotence. In verse 5 Paul refers to the Christian Jews as a “remnant chosen by grace.” How could you interpret this as a sign that God has not rejected his people?

2. Record Paul's words about "grace" and "works" found in verse 6.

NOTE: One of God's great mysteries to be accepted in faith is the principle of divine election. The fact that the Jewish-Christian "remnant" owes its existence entirely to grace excludes any sense that it pursues righteousness through practice of the Jewish law (works of the law). The principle of works is incompatible with grace and it is, as a God of grace, that God has been revealed." *Sacra Pagina*

3. "It is important to stress that Israel's identity carries on in the remnant; an identity not based upon keeping the law but solely upon divine election and grace." (*Sacra Pagina*) Paul continues to stress that God, through his mercy, is the divine "elector," a mystery which has been recorded in the examples of sibling rivalries in Genesis. Cite one such example, then read and record Exodus 33:19.

4. In verses 7-8 what do you think Israel was seeking but failed to obtain?

5a. Paul says that "the elect obtained it" but the rest were "hardened." How does Paul describe this "hardening" and what purpose does this hardening serve?

b. Whether God actually hardens hearts or uses hardened hearts to accomplish his purpose is a mystery. Read Matthew 13:14-15. How do Jesus' words help you to better understand these verses?

6. CONNECTION: One of the signs of human internal strength is the willingness to admit a mistake and to make the necessary change. In Jesus' time, most of the Jewish scribes and Pharisees were not willing to admit that the law alone could not bring about salvation. In fact, most Jews could not accept that salvation comes through grace and not works. One of the benefits of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is that we do more than just admit our mistakes. With the grace of God, we make positive changes. Is there a wonderful "penance" you have been given in the past that really helped you see the grace of God in a necessary change?

Read and record 2 Corinthians 12:9. Write a prayer today acknowledging that you are powerless to change without God's grace.

DAY TWO

Read Romans 11:9-12

7. The first two verses in today's study continue yesterday's theme that God has allowed Israel's heart to become hardened. In verse 9 Paul cites David's curse on the Israelites from Psalms 69:22-23. The "table" referred to in this verse could symbolize a great banquet or feast of rich food. To the Jews—the law was the "table"—their very life-giving nourishment. What did their table become?

8. In your own words explain how David's curse came to pass.

9. In verse 10 Paul continues to quote from Psalm 69 when he speaks of, "their backs forever bent." This can symbolize people who are blind who lean forward, groping their way through life or are bent under the crushing burden of their own iniquities. How does this image describe the unbelieving Jews of Paul's day?

10. In verse 11 Paul begins to answer the question, "Why does Israel not accept Jesus?" What answer does Paul give?

THINK: In Acts 13:45-47 Luke wrote of why the apostles (particularly Paul) turned to the Gentiles: **But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul. Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"**

Paul claims that, "salvation has come to the Gentiles **so as to make Israel jealous.**" In other words, to inspire them to emulation. *Hahn & Mitch*

11. In verse 12, Paul lists wonderful riches or blessings that can come as a result of Israel's "stumbling?" What are they?

12. CONNECTION: Many of us have seen children or friends grow up to reject their faith and/or the values with which they were raised. Often something happens that causes these people to return to the faith. Describe an example of

this you have learned of or have witnessed. How did it come about? Was there something specific that brought them back to faith in God or the Church?

Read Hosea 14:4-7. From this passage we can see that God has the same hope for all his lost children. His desire is to draw them back to live again beneath his shadow and flourish in his garden. Today pray that those who are lost might be found.

DAY THREE

Read Romans 11:13-16

13. As today's lesson begins, Paul refers to himself as the "apostle to the Gentiles." Read Acts 13:47. What do you learn from the Lord's words to Paul that relates to verse 13?

14. Paul worked hard among the Gentiles in order to bring them to the faith. According to verse 14 what is the other reason Paul worked so hard?

15. According to verse 15, the result of the Jews' rejection of Jesus' gift of salvation is "the reconciliation of the world." What will be the outcome of their acceptance?

NOTE: Verse 15 is a good example of why it may be helpful to read various translations. One translation (New Living Translation, NLT) of verse 15 may shed some light on this verse: "For since their rejection meant that God offered salvation to the rest of the world, their acceptance will be even more wonderful. It will be life for those who were dead! In 'life from the dead' Paul may have meant either a "*baptismal* resurrection that comes when believers receive a sacramental infusion of Christ's risen life, or others maintain that Paul envisions the *bodily* resurrection of believers from Israel on the last day, an eschatological event also touched on earlier in Romans. I think it probable that Paul had both of these saving events in mind." *Hahn & Mitch*

16. Read Numbers 15:17-21. This is the origin of the first image Paul uses in verse 16. For the Israelites—by offering their first batch of dough as a sacrifice to God—all of their bread was sanctified or made holy. How does this connect to Paul's message to his fellow Jews? (see Commentary)

17a. Read verse 16 and identify to whom or what you think Paul is referring:

The "root"

The "branches"

b. In your own words, what is the message Paul is sharing in this verse?

18. CONNECTION: If we were to use our modern terminology to describe Paul's attitude towards his Jewish kin, we would probably speak in terms of "tough love." Paul loves his people, but he does not hesitate to attempt to make them face the truth. Like our Heavenly Father, he loves them so much that he does not want to allow them to destroy themselves through wrong choices. Have you ever had an experience with tough love?

If you are comfortable in sharing, please do so, or you may choose to simply discuss whether or not you think that, with God's help, tough love can be successful.

Read and record Jeremiah 29:11. Knowing that God's love seeks only good for his people - pray for someone you know who needs God's help.

DAY FOUR

Read Romans 11:17-19

19. The three verses we examine today use the analogy of grafting. Read Jeremiah 11:16-17. What image do you find in this passage which is meant to represent Israel? What happened to Israel, and what is the reason for this?

20. In the beginning of verse 17 we again see Israel suffering the consequences of turning away from God. What has happened and why?

21. Also in verse 17 who is represented by the "wild olive shoot" which is grafted onto the olive tree? How would you explain this analogy?

22. In verse 18 Paul says that the “grafted” branches should not boast over the other branches. If they have an inclination to boast, they should remember a very important truth. What is this truth and what message is Paul trying to convey to the grafted branches?

23. According to verse 19 why was it believed that branches were broken off?

24. CONNECTION: In today’s lesson, Paul reminds the Gentiles that they share the “richness of the olive tree” with the Jewish faithful. “They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.” (Romans 9:4-5).

As Catholics, we are recipients of the rich tradition of Christianity as well as those that come through Jewish tradition. Share one or two traditions which truly support you in your faith and are blessings in your life.

Read and record Psalm 52:8 (Psalm 52:10 in NAB). Write a prayer of praise in gratitude for our faith traditions.

NOTE: Religious artwork, medals, the colors and seasons of the Church year and the many forms of public and private devotion are some of the treasures and traditions of our Catholic faith. As with our family heirlooms, we should not only discover or rediscover the reasons behind them but also keep them always before us...they remind us of our roots and lead us toward our heavenly destination. *Catholic Traditions and Treasures: An Illustrated Encyclopedia, Helen Hoffner, Ph.D.*

DAY FIVE

Read Romans 11:20-22

25. As today's lesson begins, Paul continues the analogy of the olive tree. In verse 19 we read that branches were specifically broken off so that others could be grafted in. For what reason does he now say they were pruned? (first half of verse 20)

26. The Gentiles who were added to the tree are then reminded that they stand fast only by faith. What are the two pieces of advice Paul shares with believers at the end of verse 20?

27. In your own words, what is the warning given in verse 21?

28a. In the beginning of verse 22, God is described as showing both kindness and severity, later theologically defined as "mercy" and "justice." (*Hahn & Mitch*) How would you describe what Paul means by the use of these words?

b. Verse 21 contains a warning by which Paul reminds the Gentiles that if the natural branches are removed (the unfaithful Israelites), then unfaithful Gentiles can also be removed. Complete verse 22 and consider how this verse applies to each of us:

Note then the kindness and the
severity toward those
but God's kindness toward you,
otherwise you also

29. Read the summary in the Commentary regarding John 15:1-2. In these verses we find another agricultural analogy. How does the passage in John relate to the passage in Romans 11?

30. CONNECTION: God is a master gardener. He knows exactly when and how to prune his trees and vines to produce the best and most bountiful yield. That is also true of his people. He knows when and what to cut away in our life and our being that we may yield the most fruit and become our best self or the best we can be. Give a concrete example from your own life of a time when you knew this to be true.

Read and record Zechariah 8:12 and begin your prayer thankful for the gifts of the master gardener.

DAY SIX

Read Romans 11:23-24

31. In today's verses Paul is expressing his certain hope in God's mercy. According to verse 23 what remains possible for Israel and how would this come about?

32. "In essence, Paul is saying that Israel's hardening is not irreversible." (*Hahn & Mitch*) What does this tell you about God's ability to save any of us?

33. Read and record 1 John 3:19-20, which assures us that God waits for our hearts to return to him.

34. For what reason does verse 24 sound as if it is contrary to nature?

35. At the end of verse 24 Paul again holds out hope for Israel. If the natural branches are grafted back onto the tree, there must still be life in them. What do you think this means with regard to Israel's separation from God?

36. CONNECTION: For the grafted branch to survive, it must be nourished by the flow of life which comes from the roots and trunk. “I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.” (John 15:5) Jesus has given us a unique gift in the Eucharist in which his own life sustaining nourishment flows in us and through us, his branches. What does it mean to you to be able to receive the Real Presence of Christ in Holy Communion? How are you nourished and sustained by it?

Reread John 15:5. You have been grafted onto Christ. Let the realization of his life within you lead you into prayer.

Read pages 82-87 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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