DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide



Part 2 of Paul's Letter to the Romans

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Romans 8:1 through 11:36

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Romans 8:1)

BACKGROUND

After describing in chapter 7 the futility of trying to live righteously while still in bondage to sin, in chapter 8 Paul went on to describe victory over the former controlling force. He taught that while forgiveness for committed sin is obtained at justification, the ultimate provision for man's sinfulness is the experience of entire sanctification, which deals with the sin nature. When the Apostle asserted in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation . . . ," he was looking at the totality of sin: both committed sins and the carnal nature of sin with which all humanity is born. The phrase "no condemnation" refers to more than mere judicial acquittal; it also indicates deliverance from the condition described in Romans 7:7-25 (the sinful disposition and inclination of the flesh). Once freed from the dominion of sin, the sanctified believer is enabled by the Spirit to live in the righteousness provided by God.

The Apostle seemingly was concerned his readers might conclude that God's plan of justification apart from the Law meant that God had rejected the Jews. Perhaps for that reason, in chapter 9, he began a three-chapter segment explaining Israel's role in God's plan, and how God's righteousness is revealed and illustrated by Israel's history.

Chapter 9 deals with election and divine sovereignty, and emphasizes that the promises of God are obtained by faith, not bloodline. Paul illustrated God's sovereignty by using the patriarch Abraham as an example, pointing out that God ordained that the Messianic line would come through Isaac, the son of promise, rather than through Abraham's eldest son, Ishmael, who was the son of the bondwoman, Hagar. The Apostle made it clear that the true children of God were the children of promise (those who believed in the God of Abraham), rather than the children of the flesh (those who are merely Abraham's biological descendants).

The theme of chapter 10 is rejection and human responsibility. In this portion of text, Paul used Israel's rejection of Christ as an example, explaining

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that while Israel had the opportunity to respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they had refused it. He asserted that salvation is offered to all, both Jew and Gentile, and each person is individually responsible for the choice he or she makes. Though Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles, his love and concern for his Jewish kinsmen is evident throughout this passage.

In chapter 11, the final segment of Paul's three-chapter explanation of Israel's role in God's plan, the Apostle concluded that after the Jew's rejection of God, the Gospel message was extended to the Gentiles. Paul explained that God's purpose in turning away from Israel was a desire to provoke Israel to jealousy as the Gentiles embraced what the Jews had refused. Then the Apostle looked ahead to the day of restoration when Israel would once again be the people of God, this time through faith in the shed Blood of Jesus Christ.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. In Romans 8, the Apostle focused on deliverance from sin and the sinful disposition and inclination of the flesh, sometimes referred to as the "sin nature" or the "carnal nature." What does this deliverance from the sin nature—the experience of entire sanctification—accomplish in our lives?

Your class will likely offer a variety of responses centering on the fact that the cleansing act of entire sanctification provides restoration of the pure nature humanity enjoyed before the fall. Thoughts brought out may include that sanctification results in unity with God and other sanctified believers. It produces a perfect heart—a state where a person loves the Lord with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength, and where thoughts, desires, and actions are motivated by devotion to God. The sanctified heart is continually seeking after God and His will. Sanctified people desire to cultivate purity in spirit, soul, and body, and to avoid anything that would contaminate any part of their beings.

Group discussion should include the fact that we are not made mentally, physically, or emotionally perfect as a result of sanctification: we are made morally perfect. We are still subject to human frailties, and will continue to face the mental, physical, and emotional limitations that are a result of the fall. While the experience of sanctification is instantaneous, we must continue to grow in spiritual maturity and Christlikeness.

It will also be important to make sure your class understands that sanctification does not eliminate the possibility of spiritual failure. Sanctified people can still choose to overrule what they know is right and fall back into sin, but that certainly is not necessary. God has provided the means for us to live victoriously.

2. In Romans 8:28, Paul asserted that God works all things together for good for those who love Him. How

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can we reconcile that statement with the fact that pain and adversity clearly occur in the lives of believers?

To correctly understand this statement, we must consider it in relation to God's eternal purpose. Paul's assertion does not mean that every incident which happens in this world is *good, but that when a person's trust is in God, every incident fits into His eternal purpose for ultimate good. God can use even painful circumstances in a beneficial way, though we may not understand* how *until eternity.*

Joni Eareckson Tada, an inspirational speaker and author, is a quadriplegic who has been confined to a wheelchair since a diving accident in 1967. When people ask her why God allows suffering, she often quotes her friend, Steve Estes, who wrote, "God permits what He hates to achieve what He loves."[1] God longs above all for people to enter into a relationship with Him and to become more like Him, and at times, this can only be accomplished through the endurance of hard trials.

This would be a good opportunity for your group to share personal experiences of times when great trials have resulted in great blessings or the gaining of spiritual ground.

3. *Foreknowledge* and *predestination* are concepts Paul alluded to in Romans 8:29-30. God chose all humanity to be made righteous through His grace, but His *foreknowledge* identifies individuals who He knew would respond to His call with repentance and faith. The word *predestinate* in verse 30 means "to predetermine." According to verse 29, what is God's predetermined purpose for all individuals?

Verse 29 indicates that God's predetermined purpose is that every individual "be conformed to the image of his Son." However, each person must choose whether or not he wants to be a participant in God's perfect plan. Peter's words in 2 Peter 3:9 reiterate the fact that God wants all to come to repentance.

If the supplemental chart at the back of this book listing the main differences between Calvinistic and Arminian teaching was not used in your class last week, it could be a good resource for this question as well.

Alternatively, you could discuss with your group what it means to be "conformed" to the image of Jesus. The dictionary definition of conform *is "to act in accordance or harmony with." Ask your class: What are some attributes or actions in our lives that would attest to our conformity with Jesus Christ? Responses should include such attributes as love for others, purity of motive, unselfishness, a forgiving spirit, etc.*

4. In chapter 9, Paul continued his instruction on the sovereignty of God. In verse 19, he imagined someone asking, "If it is all a matter of God's choice, then how can God find fault with me?" He responded in the next

verse by showing how disrespectful such a question is. His point was, who are we to question God? What illustration did Paul use in verse 21 to support his point?

Paul used a potter and his clay as an illustration. Your class should understand that Paul was not inferring by this illustration that some people are worth more than others, but simply that the Creator has the right to shape the object He creates as He wishes. Ask your group how the visual image of a potter and clay can help us keep a right perspective regarding our relationship with and to God. Thoughts brought out could include: it helps us understand that we are being shaped and our responsibility is to submit to Him; it removes any temptation to harbor pride in personal achievements; it helps us withstand times of trial with grace and trust in Him, etc.

5. Many of the Jews wanted to be righteous, but they tried to achieve that state in the wrong way. According to Romans 9:32, what was the great error of the Jews regarding how they sought to be righteous? What are some ways people try to be righteous in our day?

Verse 32 relates that the Jews failed to find a right standing before God because they "sought it not by faith." They assumed that painstaking adherence to the precepts of the Law and laws of their own making would result in righteousness. However, righteousness cannot be obtained in that way because God bestows it only in response to faith.

Class discussion of the second question will likely bring out that people in our day may try to be righteous through performing good deeds, giving to others, strictly following a set of religious rules or traditions, comparing themselves to others whom they deem less good, or simply living moral lives. However, salvation still can only be obtained through faith in the atoning Blood of Jesus Christ.

6. What was the "stumblingstone" to which the Apostle referred in Romans 9:32-33?

The "stumblingstone" the Apostle referred to was Jesus Christ—the One whom the Jews had rejected as their Messiah. Israel balked at the thought that they could only be righteous through faith in Him. Rejection was a choice made by the Jews; they recoiled from the idea of honoring Jesus because He did not align with their idea of the Messiah. In addition, they perceived Him to be a threat to the Law and their long-held religious traditions.

You could broaden your class discussion by asking your group to identify some of the aspects of believing in Jesus Christ that people "stumble" over in our day. They may mention such things as a reluctance to submit control to Him, disbelief in Him as Creator of the universe, rejection of Him as One to whom honor and obedience is due, resistance to what they see as the "rules" of Christianity, a focus on themselves, etc.

7. In Romans 10:3, Paul referenced the failure of the Jews to grasp the true meaning of information available to them in the Scriptures they studied so zealously. Paul's declaration that they endeavored to "establish their own righteousness" indicated the Jews' self-righteous pride in their own efforts. They were seeking to live up to the commandments of the Law only to prove their own worthiness. Paul went on in the next verse to assert that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." What do you think he meant by that statement?

Your class should conclude that Jesus Christ was "the end of the law" because He fulfilled its purpose and goal by His sacrificial death for mankind. The Law "ends" because obedience to it is no longer the basis for a relationship with God.

You could expand your class discussion of this question by asking your group what it means to believe. They should conclude true belief is more than acknowledging the fact that Jesus Christ died, or even that He died to provide redemption for all people everywhere. There must be a deeply personal realization that Jesus Christ died for us as individuals, and then a trust and reliance on the fact that His sacrifice avails for our sins, to the point of responding in obedience to His Word. To illustrate this, use a chair as an example. We can look at a chair and believe it is a chair. We can believe it was made of materials strong enough to support our weight. We can believe it was assembled correctly. But true *belief is when we sit in the chair and actually rely on the chair to hold our weight off the ground.*

8. In Romans 11:33-36, Paul concluded his synopsis of Israel's role in God's plan with a spontaneous outpouring of praise to God. Who could have conceived of the whole scenario with Israel and the Gentiles as God had done? Paul realized that God's ways are past finding out, and that His wisdom and knowledge were beyond him. In reference to Paul's thought expressed in verse 36, in what way are all things "of" God, "through God," and "to" God when it comes to our salvation?

All things are "of God" because He originated the plan of salvation. It was not our idea. We did not say, "I have sinned against God and need to work out a way to come back to Him." In our spiritual darkness, we did not see our need of a way back, and even if we did, we are not wise enough to come up with how that could be accomplished. The plan of salvation is all "of" Him.

All things are "through God" because we could never have freed ourselves from the prison of sin and carnality. It could only happen through the death of Jesus on our behalf—it is through Him that we obtain salvation.

All things are "to God" because God is deserving of all the glory, praise, and honor for the great plan He has had in place from the foundation of the world for the redemption of humanity. That clearly was Paul's perspective as he finished this portion of his epistle.

English evangelist and author F. B. Meyer (1847 –1929) commented on this passage, "All these words [of, through, and to] are monosyllables. A child just learning to read could easily spell them out. But who shall exhaust their meaning?"[2] *Conclude your class time by pointing out that like Paul and F. B. Meyer, when we ponder the greatness of God and His plan, we should worship Him all the more fervently.*

CONCLUSION

God's remedy for man's sinfulness is available to both Jew and Gentile, and is accessed only through faith in the shed Blood of Jesus Christ, His Son.

1. Joni E. Tada and Steve Estes, *When God Weeps*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997, page 84.
2. F. B. Meyer, *Our Daily Homily, Romans*, quoted in Bruce H. Wilkinson, *Closer Walk*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992, pg. 203.