

REVIEWING THE LESSONS

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WHAT TO DO WITH WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

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This is always the biggest challenge for me in Bible study! It's the very serious "So what?" question I think God would address to me and every reader. "What are you going to do about this now?" He seems to say, and that makes me squirm.



REFLECTING ON THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

A LOOK BACK

What do you do when the movie is over and you walk out of the theater? What do you say when the family comes home from vacation and people ask, "How was it?" What kind of resolves do you make when you emerge from military service, survive an auto accident, or have a baby?

One of the gifts God has given us humans is the capacity to reflect on our experiences and grow because of them. We emerge richer, wiser, more prepared for what comes next, hopefully! We've just completed a study of one of the great books in the Bible. What will you think, say, and do as a result of that study?

Let's take time to reflect on the journey we've made together over the past few months. The reading we did. The questions we struggled to answer. The class discussions. The stab we made (at least some of us did!) at memorizing. The prayers we prayed. The words and ideas that are still swirling in our heads.

Taking time to reflect together will be something like wearing a retainer once the braces come off, but a lot more pleasant!

REVIEWING THE LESSONS

So that you will not have to thumb through pages and pages to make a quick review, here is the progression of the 20 lesson titles and the chief issues addressed in each one:

Lesson 1 – Getting Our Bearings

The impact of Romans on folks like Augustine and Wesley. The outline focused on “righteousness.” Luther’s challenge to memorize.

Lesson 2 – A Dynamite Introduction

Paul’s introduction of himself as a “servant” who has been “called” to be an “apostle.” The Gospel (and nothing else) is the “dynamite”!

Lesson 3 – Sinnerama!

Newsreel of God’s wrath in response to human rebellion. The idolatrous “exchanges” we humans make. Special focus on homosexuality.

Lesson 4 – Judgment for the Judgmental

Our human tendency to judge others. God: a Judge with a heart. What happens on “Judgment Day.” The role of works.

Lesson 5 – Dialogue with a Jew

Misplaced confidence. Do we practice what we preach? The issue of circumcision. More important: where’s your heart?

Lesson 6 – Sola Fide: The Heart of the Gospel

The whole world stands condemned. Justification = God’s “Not Guilty” verdict. A gift that excludes boasting. To be received by faith.

Lesson 7 – Father Abraham

He was righteous by faith, before circumcision. Even before the Law was given. “Dead man hoping” becomes father at age 100!

Lesson 8 – Adam and Christ

A love like no other: God loved weak, ungodly, sinners, His enemies! Adam was “Patient Zero” in human infection. Became a “type” of Christ.

Lesson 9 – From Baptism to Battle

Baptism: our draft notice. We died to the old master, are born to serve a new one. New life “under grace.”

Lesson 10 – The Law and “I”

Marriage as metaphor for covenant. The old one with Law: I died to that! Law killed me, drove to Christ. It still functions: curb, mirror, and rule.

Lesson 11 – A New Mindset

No condemnation. Instead a new “mindset” for us. Minds set on the flesh? No. Minds set on the Spirit! Yes. The privileges of being God’s children.

Lesson 12 – The Groaning and the Glory

Present sufferings like pangs of childbirth. Future glory like child born. Hopeful living. Spirit helps us! Nothing will separate us from the love of God.

Lesson 13 – Paul’s Anguish over Israel

Why do so many in Israel refuse Jesus as Messiah? Paul anguishes. “Israel” = children of promise, not physical descendants. Potter and clay image.

Lesson 14 – “And the Winner is...”

Jews are runners stumbling on a stone – that Rock is Christ. God deliberately courts the Gentiles, but still holds out His hands to Jews.

Lesson 15 – The Story’s Happy Ending

Gentiles’ salvation makes Israel jealous. The olive tree metaphor. Gentiles grafted in. “In this way all Israel will be saved.” Mercy triumphs.

Lesson 16 – A Life of Worship

Worship redefined: the living sacrifice of your body. Using your gifts. The nature of “authentic” love. “Retaliate” on enemies with blessing!

Lesson 17 – Debts, Public and Private

Public debt – what we owe governing authorities. God’s “left hand.” Capital punishment. The “love debt” to one another.

Lesson 18 – Living with Our Differences

The “weak” and the “strong.” Food and holy days as dividing issues. No judging others. Build them up instead.

Lesson 19 – Harmony and Hope

“Bearing with.” Please others, not yourself. Bible as book of hope. Jews and Gentiles make a “double chorus” of praise. Paul’s credentials.

Lesson 20 – Faces in the Crowd

Paul’s aim at mission to Spain. Personal greetings show appreciation, affection. Word of warning about false teachers. Final doxology.

**WHAT TO DO WITH
WHAT WE’VE LEARNED**

Here are four possible ways to make use of what we’ve learned in Romans. Since I, as the writer, made the journey with you, I’ll share a couple of my reflections in each area to demonstrate what I mean. You take time to do the same. You may need to review your assignment sheets once more, or even skim through the epistle itself, as I did in order to make my list. Here goes.

First, what are the *discoveries you’d like to share?*

In all the times I read through Romans, I had never paid attention to the triple use of “exchanged” in Chapter 1 (vv. 23, 25, 26) as a description of human sin.

It gave me a different look at the deceptiveness of temptation (as if Satan were saying, “Let’s make a deal!”). I am forced to ask, “What am I seeking in ‘exchange’ for the good things God has given to me? What do I think is in it for me if I elect to defy my conscience?” It is a disturbing discovery.

I’ve long been bothered by the affirmation that some of the potter’s vessels were made for “dishonorable” use (9:21), since it sounded like God destined some people for “dishonor” and even eternal destruction. It was a relief to discover in my word study that the Greek word means “common” (so NIV) or “ordinary,” not “dishonorable.”

Second, what are *some promises of God you can claim?*

One of the greatest for me in this letter is “all things work together for good” for those who love God (8:28). It carries more freight for me the older I get (age 69 at this writing). As my wife and I face the particular challenges that come with aging (some of you know what those are!), the promise here speaks louder to us than ever before. We need to claim this when we are discouraged.

One of the overlooked promises in

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Romans I rediscovered this time through is near the letter's end. "The God of peace will soon ["swiftly" may be a better translation] crush Satan under your feet" (16:20). Really? Whether "soon" or "swiftly," THAT'S definitely a promise I need to hear, in light of what I'm going to share in the next section!

Third, what *commands from God are you being called to obey?*

The command "therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer" (14:13) struck me with special force, since I have always been a person critical of others.

Chapter 12 is filled with commands. Among those that jump out at me are "rejoice in hope" (v. 12) since I am sometimes as gloomy as Eeyore! Another is "be constant in prayer" (also in v. 12) since I find myself to be something of a "prayer midget" instead of a prayer warrior, and more so now in retirement, even though I have more "disposable" time.

Finally, "make no provision for the flesh" (13:14) is a pointed reminder to me that I have set aside (by bad habit) some fleshly niches in my schedule, such as computer time that crowds out prayer time. You too?

Fourth, what *action steps, especially changes, have you made or do you intend to make as a result of reading Romans?*

This is always the biggest challenge for me in Bible study! It's the very serious "So what?" question I think God would address to me and every reader. "What are you going to do about this now?" He seems to say, and that makes me squirm.

Because of preparing this study, I finally read Luther's Preface to Romans, something I'd never done, for which I always felt a twinge of guilt for my laziness! It sharpened my appreciation for the power of the letter and supplied me with the idea of including the "memory challenge" in these lessons.

An action step I am now pondering is to memorize Chapter 12 because of all the simple, but important, imperatives it lists. If I commit these to memory, I will, hopefully, find myself prodded by the Spirit through the Word, to take the actions He commands me here.

Got the idea? Now it's your turn. If you find all this forbidding, especially that final one involving actions to take and changes to make, I suggest that you covenant with a classmate from this study to be an accountability partner to share, pray for you, and ask how you are doing. Both of you will be blessed!

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to [the] gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ... to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen (16:25–27).