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THE LOOKOUT

JANUARY 2022

Unit: ROMANS (Part 1)

Theme: RIGHTEOUS

Overview: Romans has been responsible for more church revivals than any other New Testament book. It is proper to spend three months studying it under three separate themes. The first theme has to do with being righteous. Students will learn that God is righteous, and therefore judgment should be left in his hands. Students will learn that Abraham was a good example of being righteous, as was the remnant of Israel. Finally, students will learn what righteous living looks like in daily life.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JANUARY 23, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Praise God for the grace that makes righteous the faithful remnant.**

UNIT: Romans (Part 1)

THEME: Righteous

LESSON TEXT: Romans 9:22-33; 11:1-6

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Jeremiah 31:7-9, 31-34; Zephaniah 3:9-20

RIGHTEOUS REMNANT

BY MARK SCOTT

Romans 9–11 is often neglected in many Christian churches. Depending on where one falls on the nuances of Calvinism and millennialism, the content is challenging. But Alexander Campbell knew it was there in his Bible, and it served as the basis for his famous “Sermon on the Law” (1816).

If Romans addresses alienation from God (chapters 1–3), justification by God (3–5), and sanctification through God (6–8), then what are we to do with this next section (9–11)? What positions do the Israelites and Gentiles play in the working out of God’s salvation history? This may sound like heady stuff for theological eggheads. But the doctrinal backdrop to this issue may frame-up the applications of Romans in chapters 12–16. A formula evident in the missionary journeys in Acts might help us process these chapters: Jewish rejection leads to Gentile inclusion, which leads to Jewish jealousy, which leads to Jewish acceptance or further rejection. Our text follows that progression.

The Righteous Remnant Inclusion

Romans 9:22-26

Paul was willing to put his neck on the line for the remnant (abandoned ones or surplus ones—a different word is used in Romans 11:5, but it is synonymous). But who is in this group of people? Our default setting is to answer: the nation of literal, physical Israel. But keep in mind that the Jews loved sarcasm, irony, and paronomasia (i.e., plays on words). Is that what is going on in Romans 9:6b—a play on words? “For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.” Is “Israel” a loaded term? Does just having Jewish blood running through one’s veins qualify one to be in the remnant? Or has God’s definition of who was in the real Israel always been inclusive (i.e., made up of both Jews and Gentiles)?

God’s sovereignty and election were at work during the times of the patriarchs and of Moses (Romans 9:7-13, 14-18). Like a potter with clay (*think Jeremiah 18*), God had planned from the beginning for the Gentile inclusion to be in his remnant (Romans 9:19-21). He bore up with great patience under Israel’s disobedience. The Israelites deserved his *wrath* and *destruction*, but to show *his glory* he made them *objects of his mercy*. This was so both Jews and Gentiles could be called “his people” (which is the significance of the quote from Hosea 1:10; 2:23). Maybe the remnant is not just “physical” Israel or “spiritual” Israel. Maybe it is just “Israel.”

The Righteous Remnant Exclusion

Romans 9:27-29

Paul pieced together a few different passages from Isaiah to frame up more of his argument. Isaiah 1:9; 13:19; and 10:22-23 are cited. The remnant did not exclude Gentiles. It excluded faithless Israel. Even though, in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, Israel would be *like the sand by the sea*, only some Israelites would be saved. The Lord would have to *carry out his sentence* (logos/word) quickly on the nation of Israel. In fact, had God not done so, the nation that gave birth to the Messiah would *become like Sodom and Gomorrah* (Genesis 18). Those not in the remnant were guilty of committing the sin of presumption.

The Righteous Faithful Remnant

Romans 9:30-33

The key to being in the remnant was faith, as it was in the entire book of Romans. Being in the remnant did not come because works were pursued. Remnant people operate on faith. Gentiles become part of the remnant by faith. Jewish people must get in the same way. Striving to get in by any other way would cause one to fall. To further that point, Paul used the language of Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22. Jesus was the *stumbling stone* (or rock) that Paul had in mind (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:4). If Jew or Gentile does not get faith in that Rock right they will fall and be *put to shame*. (Romans 10 is skipped for now since it will be discussed in February.)

The Righteous Preserved Remnant

Romans 11:1-6

By this point in Paul’s argument, one might assume that faithful Gentiles can be in the remnant, but that Jews now have no place at all. Not so fast. To ensure that his readers do not misunderstand, Paul asked another leading question, “*Did God reject* (push away or drive away) *his people?*” No! And the writer is the best example. Paul himself is a Jew—in fact, he was from the tribe of Benjamin, the same as King Saul.

Finally, Paul appealed to the Elijah narrative of 1 Kings to make his case for the remnant being preserved. Elijah went through a case of the “Jezebel blues” and felt he was the only faithful one in Israel (1 Kings 19:9-14). God reminded the depressed prophet that a remnant had been preserved by grace—not works. ■

APPLICATION

LEFTOVERS

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you like leftovers? Do you adhere to the adage, “Waste not, want not”? Do you enjoy turkey sandwiches on the weekend after Thanksgiving? Do you warm up last night’s pizza in the microwave and eat it for breakfast? Do you ask for a box at the restaurant so you can take the leftovers home with you? Do you agree that soup tastes better the day after it’s made?

Or maybe you dislike leftovers. You insist on eating only the freshest of foods. If your family doesn’t consume the entire casserole, you throw it away, because no one will touch it after it’s been in the refrigerator for a couple of days.

The word *leftover* sounds stale and unappealing. The Law of Moses instructed the Israelites to give the firstfruits of their labors, not the scraps—to sacrifice the best lamb in the flock, not skimp by offering the scrawniest animal they could find. By tithing, we prioritize giving in our budgets because we recognize that the first 10 percent (not whatever happens to be left at the end of the month) belongs to the Lord.

However, the Bible also has some positive things to say about leftovers. The Law required farmers to leave some grain, olives, and grapes behind in their fields at harvest time. “Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow” (Deuteronomy 24:21)—a practical, compassionate way to provide for those in need. And remember what happened after Jesus fed the 5,000? He instructed his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted” (John 6:12). They gathered up 12 baskets of leftover bread and fish, reinforcing the magnitude of Jesus’ miracle and teaching a lesson about good stewardship.

Leftover People?

At first glance, the word *remnant* sounds as unappealing as last week’s casserole. Yet, throughout the Scriptures God promises to bless a righteous

remnant of his people. Jeremiah predicted that faithful followers of the Lord would gather from all over the world, including “the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labor” (Jeremiah 31:7-8). Zephaniah looked forward to a golden era when God would regather the remnant of Israel, including “the meek and humble” who “trust in the name of the Lord” (Zephaniah 3:12). The apostle Paul recalled how in the days of Elijah most Israelites had drifted into idolatry, but God still had 7,000 servants who had “not bowed the knee to Baal. So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace” (Romans 11:4-5).

What does God’s “remnant chosen by grace” mean to us? Here are three points to consider.

It’s a reminder about gratitude. We should be grateful that throughout history, God’s plans never have been thwarted and he has continued to pour out his grace—even if only a faithful few were willing to accept it.

It’s a reminder about faithfulness. No matter what happens, we must remain loyal to the Lord and persevere in faith and service.

It’s a reminder about courage. Even if the majority rejects the Lord and chooses a different path, we must be part of his faithful remnant, trusting God and following no matter where he leads.

Jesus asked, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). Let’s do our part to ensure the answer is yes.

Personal Challenge: What practical difference does it make to be a follower of Jesus? If you were not a Christian, how would your lifestyle be different than it is now? How does your faith in Christ impact the way you approach your job, your relationships, your finances, your schedule, and your attitude about life? ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. When and how did you sense God's unconditional and saving love this week?
2. In what areas of your life do you find it easiest to obey God? What areas are most difficult?

Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 9:22-33; 11:1-6** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate these passages in their own words in a minute or less.

3. What is your initial impression of these passages?
4. Let's dig deeper into these passages:
 - Look at the three sets of leading questions in these passages (9:22-24, 30-32; 11:1) and the way those questions are addressed. How do those help you comprehend the overall purpose of these passages?
 - According to the Old Testament prophets cited, how does God see the objects of his mercy?
 - The *stone* and *rock* from Isaiah (Romans 9:33) refer to Jesus (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:4). How did he cause some people to stumble and fall and others to "never be put to shame"?
 - By what criterion are people of the remnant chosen?
5. What do you learn about God and his grace from these passages?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. What can you do to assure you are obeying God not as a work to be saved, but because of God's grace for you?
8. Who will you tell about God's grace this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. In what area of your life do you need more of God's patience?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Romans 14:1-5, 13-23**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■