

Romans



Lesson 1: The Obedience of Faith

Suggested Responses

Suggested responses are provided for the purpose of guiding group discussion safely within the bounds of Church teaching. Small group discussion leaders should become familiar with the suggested responses prior to group discussion. In order to make the most of this study, all participants are encouraged to respond to the questions on their own before reading the suggested responses.

1. In Romans 1:1, Paul calls himself both “a servant of Jesus Christ” and “an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.” A servant of Jesus Christ is one who is perfectly obedient to God and who gives one’s life completely as a gift to God. Paragraph 876 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that the servants of Jesus Christ are “slaves,” in that they must imitate the one who took “the form of a slave” for all mankind. The gospel they preach is not their own, but comes from Christ, and thus “they must freely become the slaves of all.” An “apostle” is a “sent one” or messenger, chosen and directed by Jesus Christ. Paragraph 76 of the *Catechism* tells us that apostles are entirely at the ministerial service of the gospel by either preaching or writing about what they have received “from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or [from] the prompting of the Holy Spirit.” Paul tells us that the “gospel of God,” to which he is obligated as both servant and apostle, is the “good news” that Jesus Christ is both the Son of David and the Son of God—the fulfillment of all that the law and the prophets had promised—whose death and Resurrection have established a New Covenant “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations” (Rom 1:2-5).
2. In *Points to Ponder* we learn that Paul—unlike the “unschooled” twelve apostles—was a Pharisee with impeccable credentials. He was perfect in his observance of the law, “a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless ...” (Phil 3:5-6). He was also the prize student of Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), one of the most renowned and respected rabbis in Jewish history. Because of Paul’s training and reputation, the Jewish authorities could not say he did not understand the Torah, or that he was not educated in the finer points of Mosaic Law. This meant they had to take him, his testimony, and his arguments seriously. With regard to the twelve apostles, Paul’s call and commission were different from theirs in the sense that he did not spend time with Jesus Christ during the Lord’s earthly ministry. On the other hand, Paul and the twelve met the risen Christ, and they all received (albeit in very different ways) an extended period of preparation before their respective missions. All of the apostles carried out their work in the bosom of the Church, not in isolation from it (Acts 13:1-3).
3. Paul refers to Jesus as a descendant of King David “according to the flesh” in order to emphasize to Jewish Christians that Jesus alone is the fully human and fully divine Son of God promised to Israel by the prophets (CCC 437). From Paul’s words, a Jewish audience would easily recall 2 Samuel 7, which speaks of a “Son of David” who will one day become the messianic heir to the covenant God made with David: “I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son” (2 Sam 7:12-14).
4. As *Points to Ponder* tells us, Paul views faith and obedience as two sides of the same coin. They are not contradictory; rather, they are inter-dependent; and combined, they offer man the greatest liberty imaginable. The *Catechism* explains that “by faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God,” and this “human response” to God is called “the obedience of faith” (CCC 143). By the “obedience of faith” Paul refers to a life of worship, love, and obedience to the commands of God and the directives of the Holy Spirit. Everyone, without exception, is called to enter into the obedience of faith, which leads ultimately to sainthood (Rom 1:7)—that is, to the glorious and full participation in the life of the Holy Trinity (CCC 1812).

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5. *Points to Ponder* tells us that Rome was important for several interconnected reasons. Paul wished to use the capitol of the Roman Empire as a base for further evangelistic work in western Europe (Rom 15:24). In addition, Paul says that he desired to build up the Christians there by imparting “some spiritual gifts” to them (Rom 1:11). Paul also wished to “reap some harvest” in Rome itself (Rom 1:13). Furthermore, as a rabbi steeped in the Old Testament and as one called to be an “apostle to the Gentiles,” Paul was probably very familiar with the prophecies in Daniel (chapters 2, 7, and 9) foretelling four Gentile empires (Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman) that would dominate Israel after Daniel’s time. This same series of prophecies taught that the fourth and final Empire would be conquered by the coming of the Messiah. Thus, the evangelization of Rome—the fourth empire of Daniel’s prophecy—had a supernatural and prophetic significance, as well as a strategic and pastoral one for Paul.
 6. The spiritual gifts are those “permanent dispositions that make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1830). In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit gives the faithful a variety of gifts to be used “for the common good.” The *Catechism* likewise teaches that “there is only one Spirit who, according to his own richness and the needs of the ministries, gives his different gifts for the welfare of the Church” (CCC 791). In all cases, the use of spiritual gifts is meant to build up the unity of the mystical body of Christ, which “triumphs over all human divisions.” To the Romans specifically, Paul longs to impart a spiritual gift that will “strengthen” and “encourage” them (Rom 1:11-12).
 7. Paul regarded his apostolic office as a sacred obligation not only to God, who had granted it to him, but to the peoples God had called him to serve in humility and love. Following closely the directive and example of Jesus, Paul believed that the apostles were meant to serve, not to be served (Mk 10:45). As Paul wrote elsewhere, “For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16). This meant sacrificing comfort, money, and prestige; it meant suffering hunger, torture, persecution, and mockery. Paul was well aware of how he had been saved from damnation by the mercy and grace of God, and he was driven by his awareness that he must become “a slave to all,” that he must “become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:19, 22).