

Romans



Lesson 2: Good News and Bad News

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. For Paul, the gospel is not a mere message or body of ideas; it contains the “righteousness of God” and has the “power” to save. This promise of salvation is for “every one who has faith” (Rom 1:16-17). This promise is also reflected in Paul’s letter to Timothy, which reiterates that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). By declaring that this salvation is available “to the Jew first and also the Greek,” Paul is honoring the historical fact that the Jews (Israel), descended from Abraham, were the first to hear the word of God. But the revelation of God to the Jews was not to be exclusive; rather, God formed Israel to serve as the “root onto which the Gentiles would be grafted, once they came to believe” (CCC 60).
2. *Points to Ponder* reveals that “righteousness” (or justification) is the gracious gift of Trinitarian life by which God not only forgives us our sins, but fundamentally transforms us into “new creations” and makes us participants in the divine nature (CCC 1989). Paul states that the “righteousness of God is revealed through faith,” and that “he who through faith is righteous shall live” (Rom 1:17). This statement, however, does not suggest that “faith alone” is sufficient for God to declare one as “righteous.” In 1 Cor 13:2, Paul asserts that faith without love makes man “nothing.” In addition, the apostle James provides the example of Abraham, who was made righteous not by faith alone, but by his obedience to the will of God: “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (Jas 2:24). Thus, faith alone is not sufficient for salvation, but rather—as both Paul and James state—faith shaped by works of love in obedience to the will of God is what sets apart a man as “righteous.”
3. Paul says that God’s invisible nature can be “perceived in the things that have been made” (Rom 1:20). In *Points to Ponder* we learn that Paul teaches that the existence of God and the basics of his moral requirements for our lives can be known by the light of “natural” reason, which is available to us simply by surveying the natural world that God created. Paragraphs 31 through 33 of the *Catechism* explain that because God created us in his image, we all possess an innate desire to know and to love him (CCC 31). We can thus come to knowledge of God through our observations of the world’s order and beauty (CCC 32) and through our own inner conscience and personal longing for the infinite and for happiness (CCC 33). For those persons who sincerely seek God in these ways, “they are without excuse,” says Paul, for anything they do that violates the knowledge of God they have come to attain (Rom 1:20).
4. Unlike the human emotion of anger, which is often uncontrolled and a catalyst for injustice, the “wrath of God” is a fixed response of righteous anger that effects perfect justice against those who sin against the one true God. Ephesians 5:5-6 reminds us that only the holy are fit to enter the heavenly kingdom of God, and “the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” In John’s Gospel we are told that only those who believe in and obey the Son (Jesus Christ) will have eternal life, and “he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him” (Jn 3:36). Thus, the “wrath of God” is just punishment directed against wicked or sinful men “who by their wickedness suppress the truth,” that is, Jesus Christ—who alone is the totality of God’s truth.
5. Those who fail to worship the one true God (i.e., “to honor him as God or give thanks to him”) will suffer



a darkened intellect (Rom 1:21) and dishonor their bodies (Rom 1:24). Although they consider themselves wise, Paul says, they are actually fools “because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and they worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:22, 25). The *Catechism* likewise teaches that those who fail to worship the one true God will suffer “endless disintegration” (CCC 2114) of heart, mind, and body.

6. Paul emphasizes that God’s response to human sin is to give us what we want. God permits human sin to run its course by “giving sinful humanity up” to the lusts of their hearts (Rom 1:24). In other words, God allows man to suffer the consequences of sin, but only so that man may eventually be moved by grace to seek reconciliation with God, “who is rich in mercy and solicitous for the salvation of men” (CCC 1489).
7. Perhaps Paul’s most powerful discourse on the sins of the flesh can be found in his first letter to the Corinthians. In this letter, Paul reminds the early Christian community that their “bodies are members of Christ” and must, therefore, never be dishonored through prostitution, homosexuality, fornication, adultery, and so on. Paul admonishes the community sternly in this passage: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify your body” (1 Cor 6:19-20). Paragraph 364 of the *Catechism* states that “the human body shares in the dignity of ‘the image of God’” because the human body is “animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit.” Thus, man is obligated to “regard his body as good and to hold it in honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day.”