

For the week of February 11- 17, 2018

Based on Tom Velasco's message from February 10-11

## Commit to the Long Game

**Best Way to Prepare for Your Group?** Listen to the teaching and read the appropriate scripture. Your time together isn't meant to be a re-teaching of the most recent lesson. Instead, the discussion points and questions are designed to encourage group members to share insight and application of what they've learned—and thereby grow closer to the Lord and each other.

### [Format for the Evening]

#### WELCOME:

Get to know each other. Re-introduce yourselves if need be and welcome newcomers. Invite those new to the group to share a little about their lives and Christian experience. Spend some time talking about real-life issues that may have come up during prayer or fellowship time the previous week. These Community Groups are more than Bible studies. They are designed to help believers form deep and lasting relationships.

**KEY PASSAGE:** *"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly Not!" –Romans 9:14*

**Principle Theme:** God possesses sovereign control over the affairs of our lives, which means that nothing happens outside of His permissive will, and this is something that should bring us comfort and great joy in our times of distress. In this truth we find that, although things might seem bad, they will in fact be turned for good, because God Himself allowed them for a reason.

#### TALK ABOUT THE TEACHING:

- Keep in mind that the principle issue that Paul is addressing in this chapter revolves around the role that the nation of Israel plays in redemptive history.
  - Remember that it was common for Jews to see themselves as playing a special role in the world, a role that people of other tribes and ethnicities were excluded from.
    - Also remember that, although it was certainly true that they were special in the sense that God had selected them to be his particular people (Deut. 7:6-8), it wasn't always clear just what that meant practically.
    - Many Jews in that day interpreted God's election of Israel as proof that they were favored over people of other ethnicities, with many taking it so far as to believe that Gentiles (non-Jewish people) were not accepted or loved by God and might face the judgment of hell just on account of the fact that they did not belong to the chosen people.
    - This ethnocentrism commonly manifested itself as prejudice against people of other ethnicities. We see this in John 18:28, when the Jewish leaders refused to enter the Roman governor Pontius Pilate's house on account of the fact that they did not want to defile themselves during a religious feast. This is the terminology used in that day...a person could literally be seen as dirty simply for being a Gentile.

- It is also important to remember that the first Christians were almost exclusively Jewish ethnically, and they saw themselves as a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies given to the Jews. They didn't think of themselves as starting a new religion, they believed that they were just following the true Jewish religion, which they had always followed.
  - Members of the early Church also exhibited the ethnocentrism and prejudice of many of their contemporaries, a fact that is exhibited quite plainly in Acts 10 and Galatians 2.
    - Acts 10 recounts the story of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert to Christianity, and how God directed Peter to find him and preach the gospel to him. In verse 28, Peter says to Cornelius, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean."
      - In this passage, we see the first time that Jewish believers were enlightened to the fact that God is God over all people and that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile.
      - In verse 34, Peter takes all of this further by telling Cornelius "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.<sup>35</sup> But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him."
        - This shows what was a fundamental shift for the early Christians, that there is no partiality with God.
    - Galatians chapter 2 highlights this same issue quite poignantly with Paul explaining clearly what application we should take from this issue that the early church dealt with.
- It is vital to understand that the context of Romans 9 is dealing with the confusion that Jewish believers were wrestling with in light of the new economy that God had revealed to them in the Church. If the Church is God's chosen people, and God is impartial towards both Jew and Gentile alike, then what advantage does one have in being Jewish? Why did God ever even bother to convey the idea of Israel as God's elect nation?
  - One might have taken it even further, and asked whether God had made a mistake in selecting Israel as a nation. Was His election of the Church of Christ, containing both Jew and Gentile, plan B? Was it an attempt to course correct?
- It is this broad overarching issue that is behind Romans 9 and it informs every point that Paul is making. At the most basic level, in Romans 9, Paul is simply telling his reader that God did not make a mistake with Israel. He's saying that God chose Israel and sovereignly guided it and used it in exactly the way He intended.
  - Furthermore, the Church is not plan B. His intention was always to bring about a Church of Christ composed of both Jew and Gentile, which would serve as His people with the mission of reconciling the whole world to Himself.

## THINK ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS FOR GOD TO "LOVE JACOB AND HATE ESAU"

### DISCUSS:

1. With these things in mind, and the context of Malachi 1:2-3, what does it mean for God to love Jacob and hate Esau? Is he referring to two specific individual people here?
2. Read Psalm 5:5. What does it mean when he says, "God hates all **workers** of iniquity"? Does this contradict the adage we often teach that God hates the sin but loves the sinner? Does it contradict passages like John 3:16, where we read that He loves the world? Explain your answer.
3. Given what was covered in this weekend's sermon, what does "hate" actually mean in these contexts? (Reread Luke 14:26-27 and cf. Matthew 10:37-38)

4. Why is it necessary that God “reject” some and “accept” others? Why can’t He just accept everyone? What does this teach us about God? Man? And Creation?
5. Universalism is the heretical doctrinal teaching that all people are ultimately destined for salvation in God’s economy. How does Romans 9 address this issue?

#### **CONTINUE TO TALK ABOUT THE TEACHING:**

- It would be helpful to skim over Exodus 7-11, looking for the instances where God speaks of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart.
- Make sure to note that the key meaning of this phrase, “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart,” indicates essentially that God would not let Pharaoh give in to Moses’ demands to let the people go, for, if Pharaoh did that, God would not have occasion to bring the plagues on Egypt, which He fully intended to do.
- This gives rise to the question that Paul asks in Romans 9:19 – “Why does he still find fault? For who has resisted his will?” meaning, why does God blame Pharaoh, when he just ended up doing what God wanted him to do?

#### **DISCUSS:**

1. How does Paul answer the last question in verse 20? Is there anything else we can say about it that might ease the difficulty of this verse for an honest inquirer?
2. For a person to be guilty of a sin, does he have to be free to do otherwise? Why or why not?
3. How does this question relate to the overall context of the passage regarding Israel and the Church?
4. Read Acts 17:26-27 and I Peter 1:2. Do these passages shed any light on the meaning of this text?
5. Is there a way to reconcile the idea that God is in control of the events of the world with the idea that humanity is free to obey and rebel against God’s decrees?
6. What practical encouragement can we take away from this idea that God is to some degree in control of the events and affairs of life? How might we take comfort in this?

#### **TAKE TIME TO PRAY:**

Please pray that God would show us how to discern His will in each of our own lives. In doing this, ask that God would particularly make clear to each of us just how present He is in our lives and how He is in control of our affairs. Ask that He not only fulfill His promise *“to work all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28), but to also give us confidence that He is in fact doing so.

#### **TRANSITION TO REAL LIFE:**

Before you head home take some time to talk about the week ahead, make note of any needs and prayer requests, and enjoy each other’s company. That’s what family does.

## **WEEKLY PRAYER REQUESTS**

*“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!” –Romans 9:14*

The goal of faithfulness is not that we will do work for God, but that He will be free to do His work through us. God calls us to His service and places tremendous responsibilities on us. He expects no complaining on our part and offers no explanation on His part. God wants to use us as He used His own Son. – Oswald Chambers in *My Utmost for His Highest*

### **Our Core Group:**

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### **Our International Missions: Send Hope India**

- Continue to pray for the outreach in Varanasi in northern India. As many of you know Henry, Pastor Guna's son, is very active in evangelism in this area. He has been brought in for police questioning and the government is also going to be inspecting the Homes of Hope in the area with a mind to close them down. Pray for God's protection.
- Pray for Sarah Van Brunt who will be traveling to California February 16-17 to teach one of the partnering churches how to share about the ministry. Pray for donations to cover her trip.
- Pray for more sponsors for pastors, church plants in India, and especially for the Bible College. We have had to temporarily close a Bible College due to lack of funding. Pray that soon we will be able to reopen the facility. Ask for God's guidance and wisdom as to how to raise funds effectively for this great need.
- Please pray also for wisdom on how to get the word out and communicate the needs of the beautiful people in the leprosy homes. They especially need medical supplies and medication to treat diabetes. Please ask for God's provision of this and much more.

### **Our Local Ministry: Youth Ministry**

- Please pray for our Junior High and Senior High Youth Groups. Pray that Pastors Reggie and Parker will be able to inspire these young adults to develop their own walk of faith.
- Pray that our young people will be enthusiastic about the Gospel and will carry it into their schools and communities.
- Ask that our Youth Groups will be so fun and engaging that many teens will come to be encouraged and find peace in the midst of a chaotic world.
- Pray that Reggie and Parker have great wisdom in creating a balance of fun and learning.