

SAKLC CONVERSATIONS

Mid-week adult study at St Armands Key Lutheran Church, Sarasota, FL

"ROMANS, a letter for today"

Session Plan *"and facilitator's notes"* for

Thursday, January 26, 2017

OPENING PASTORAL PRAYER

OUR OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION:

1. To examine Paul's 'summons' to proclaim Christ; viewing the experience through the eyes of Kerygma Resource Book author [Roetzel] more as *"Call"* and less as *"Conversion."* [this section is carried forward from our last study session]
2. To understand why it is important that we remember Romans is a *'real'* letter written to specific people and addressing specific situations.
3. To identify specific issues that Paul addresses in Romans 1:1-17

1) PAUL'S CALL (*Conversion*)

- A) On the way to Damascus he experienced a vision of Christ which changed his entire life. Whether it occurred in his mind (Gal. 1:12,16) or externally (Acts 9:3-8; 22:6-11; 26:12-19) remains unclear. It changed him from a persecutor to a supporter of Christianity.
- B) Christ himself ordered Paul to witness to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8-11 Gal. 2:7). At that time followers of Christ were part of Judaism, so in reality Paul switched from Pharisaic Judaism to Christian Judaism.
- C) Paul reports (Gal. 1:17-24) that he immediately went to Arabia. He obviously joined in with mission work already underway to the Gentiles. He probably avoided contact with the apostles at this time because he expected their hostility to the Gentile mission.
- D) Three {3} years later he visited with Peter in Jerusalem for fifteen days and also saw James the "brother" of the Lord (Gal. 1:18-24). Following his visit he set out for Antioch on a mission trip through his home area, Syria and Cilicia where he converted Gentiles. (Gal. 1:21). This helped make Christianity a universal religion.

- E) Toward the end of his life, Paul was imprisoned in Jerusalem, but then sent to Caesarea. Two years later, Paul was to be sent back to Jerusalem for trial, but preferred, instead, to be sent to Rome, where he arrived in A.D. 60. He spent two years there under arrest.

- F) As previously noted (*earlier sessions*) Acts at times disagrees with Paul's letters on certain facts early in Paul's life. The author of Acts had no access to the letters because they weren't in one collection until the first quarter of the second century. Scholars have concluded that the author of Acts used a style of "*literary design*" to fill out his history.

- G) Eusebius of Caesarea reports that Paul was beheaded under the Roman Emperor Nero in either A.D. 64 or 67.

2) Understanding Romans as a 'real' letter

Facilitator's introductory comments: In our contemporary experiences, writing letters of a '*personal*' nature has virtually become a "*lost art*;" think back on your own experience in writing and/or reading important '*personal*' letters. Remember *love* letters that you received or *{if you're really lucky!}* still receive! Or, perhaps you received letters from a family member serving on assignment in the military; or, from a child/grandchild away from home for the very first time attending college! Think about how you poured over those letters! How you noticed every little turn of phrase! How you sought to decipher each word! How you read between the lines! How you noticed changes from one letter to the next. How you may have saved those letters for posterity! How you read those letters repeatedly to find confirmation or discontinuation of your understanding of the writer's intent. *That kind of keen attention to the most minute detail and nuance can be very useful to us in reading Romans.*

Romans is first and foremost a Letter. *How is a letter different from an essay or a book of theology?* Dr. Roetzel, the author of our Resource Book [pgs. 17-19] in the section "*A Real Letter*," emphasizes that all of the biblical "*books*" Paul wrote were actually letters written to specific churches in response to situations or problems that had come to his attention.

The nature of Paul's "*Salutation*" in Romans 1:1-7, is a typical format that was used in the Greco-Roman world of his day. It included the name of the sender, the recipients, and a brief greeting ("*From A to B, Greetings*"). Paul followed the standard formula of his time and culture. He did, however, greatly lengthen this [*Romans*] salutation in comparison with other examples typical of his day. That enlargement demonstrates the emphasis Paul placed on the Gospel and his relationship to it. The salutation has a distinctive theological and christological orientation, something that would have obviously been unheard of in the wider pagan world.

We will seek to spot some important ‘shadings’ of meaning applied to specific words and phrases. For example, a comparison of the opening of Romans with that of 1 Thessalonians, [*Paul’s very first letter*], reveals significant differences and provides us with a better sense of Paul’s agenda in writing. Note the phrase: “*Paul a slave of Christ Jesus.*” Paul rarely uses the term “*slave*” in the salutations of other letters. Only in Philippians does he use the word in the opening and then in a quite different way. {compare texts which are printed below}

Think how “*slave*” [Greek: “*doulos*”] would have been understood in the first century? What was the *nature of slavery*? What were the *conditions* of slaves? How many modern-day Christians have direct experience with slavery?

We also need to pay special attention to Paul’s identification of himself as an ‘*apostle*.’ (in Greek “*apostolos*”) definition: an envoy, ambassador, or messenger commissioned to carry out the instructions of the commissioning agent. Furthermore, note the language around that reference, “*called to be an apostle.*” Called by whom? Called for what? What is the evidence? We are so regularly accustomed to thinking of Paul as an apostle that it may be very difficult for us to imagine a time when many disputed his legitimacy. Why would they be skeptical of his apostolic status? How does an *apostle* differ from a *disciple*?

Nothing specific is revealed in the New Testament as to the start or origination of the church in Rome. It is possible that there were “*Roman visitors*” in Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, following the Lord’s ascension. They may have been among the 3000 reported as saved; possibly they took the “*Good News*” back to Rome upon their return home.

When Paul wrote the Letter to the Romans from Corinth, toward the end of his career, he fully intended to take his gospel message to Spain. Paul only wanted to stop briefly to visit the Christians there. Although he had never been to Rome, he had heard about quarrels within the Roman congregations. We can only speculate about the nature of those open disagreements. But, from secular historical records we do know that in 49 AD the Roman Emperor Claudius had expelled Christian Jews from Rome, but he allowed Gentile Christians to remain. After the death of Claudius in 54 AD, Nero allowed Jewish Christians to return. Their return may have caused friction between the Jewish arrivals and the Gentile believers, to the extent that Paul feared this dissension would jeopardize the ability of the Roman church to share in his stated mission to Spain.

Now examine and compare the following references:

Romans 1:1–7: (“The Salutation”) *Paul, a servant* [slave] *of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,* ² *which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures,* ³ *the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh* ⁴ *and was declared to be Son of God with power according*

to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, ⁶ including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷ To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:1 *Paul and Timothy, servants [slaves] of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Thessalonians 1:1

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

Before proceeding, consider these two overarching questions:

- a) *What was Paul's authority to counsel the Romans?*
- b) *Can Gentiles be Christians without converting to Judaism?*

3) WHAT WE LEARN FROM "The Salutation" - ROMANS 1:1-7:

A) Paul's Vocation (1:1)

- 1. He Was A Servant of Jesus Christ.
- 2. He Was Called As An Apostle.
- 3. He Was Set Apart for the Gospel of God.

B) The Nature of the Gospel of God (1:2-4)

- 1. It Was Promised in the Holy Scriptures.
- 2. It Concerns Jesus God's Son.
- 3. It Concerns Jesus as a Descendent of David.
- 4. It Concerns Jesus as the Son-of-God-in-Power.
- 5. It involves faithful obedience

C) The Purpose of Paul's Apostleship (1:5)

1. Through Christ, Paul received grace and apostleship in order to lead the Gentiles to trust in the Lord.

D) Paul's identification of the Roman Christians: (1:6-7)

1. They were 'Called' to belong to Jesus Christ.
2. They are loved by God.
3. They were 'Called' To Be Saints.
4. They have Grace and Peace from God.

Romans 1:8-15 ("The Thanksgiving") ***First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. ⁹For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, ¹⁰asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹²or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³I want you to know, brothers and sisters^l that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish ¹⁵—hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.***

4) WHAT WE LEARN FROM "The Thanksgiving" - ROMANS 1:8-15:

A) Thanks to God (vs.8).

1. Paul thanks God through Jesus Christ for all the Romans.
2. The faith of the Romans is proclaimed throughout the whole world.

B) Paul is a dedicated servant of God (9-10).

1. Paul serves God with fervency in the preaching of the gospel
2. God is Paul's witness that he continuously remembers the Romans in prayer.
3. Paul's prayer is that he might finally succeed in visiting them.

C) Paul's objective in visiting the Romans: (11-12).

1. Paul longs to see them
2. Paul wants to impart some spiritual gift to the Romans.
3. That spiritual gift will strengthen the Romans.
4. Paul wants to be mutually comforted by his faith and that of the Romans.

D) Specific reasons Paul wanted to visit the Roman church (13-15)

1. Paul does not want them to be unaware that he tried several times
2. Paul was prevented in coming to Rome until now.
3. Paul wanted to have some fruit among them.
4. Paul already has fruit among the rest of the Gentiles.
5. Paul was a debtor to Greeks, barbarians, the wise and the foolish.
6. Paul was eager to preach the gospel to those in Rome.

5) ROMANS 1:16-17 {the central message of Paul's entire letter}

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith, as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

NOW ITS TIME FOR YOU TO ENGAGE IN SOME PERSONAL REFLECTION! -

(Your Instruction: Read through each of the phrases below slowly and carefully. Then choose one that seems important to you and write something about what this phrase means to you. You might simply write words or phrases that come to your mind. *(In #1 below for example, words might be "proud," "confident" or "willing to take risks.")* Or, you might write a sentence or two to express the meaning or give an example of a way you see this phrase operating in your life. Those who volunteer may share their answers with others!)

1) I am not ashamed of the gospel;

2)it is the power of God for salvation

3) ...to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

4) ...For in it the righteousness of God is revealed *(What is God's Righteousness?)*

5) ...through faith for faith;

6) ...as it is written, “the one who is righteous will live by faith.”

ADDENDA: Romans 1-16 The Message Translation (MSG)

I, Paul, am a devoted slave of Jesus Christ on assignment, authorized as an apostle to proclaim God’s words and acts. I write this letter to all the believers in Rome, God’s friends.

The sacred writings contain preliminary reports by the prophets on God’s Son. His descent from David roots him in history; his unique identity as Son of God was shown by the Spirit when Jesus was raised from the dead, setting him apart as the Messiah, our Master. Through him we received both the generous gift of his life and the urgent task of passing it on to others who receive it by entering into obedient trust in Jesus. You are who you are through this gift and

call of Jesus Christ! And I greet you now with all the generosity of God our Father and our Master Jesus, the Messiah.

I thank God through Jesus for every one of you. That's first. People everywhere keep telling me about your lives of faith, and every time I hear them, I thank him. And God, whom I so love to worship and serve by spreading the good news of his Son—the Message!—knows that every time I think of you in my prayers, which is practically all the time, I ask him to clear the way for me to come and see you. The longer this waiting goes on, the deeper the ache. I so want to be there to deliver God's gift in person and watch you grow stronger right before my eyes! But don't think I'm not expecting to get something out of this, too! You have as much to give me as I do to you.

Please don't misinterpret my failure to visit you, friends. You have no idea how many times I've made plans for Rome. I've been determined to get some personal enjoyment out of God's work among you, as I have in so many other non-Jewish towns and communities. But something has always come up and prevented it. Everyone I meet—it matters little whether they're mannered or rude, smart or simple—deepens my sense of interdependence and obligation. And that's why I can't wait to get to you in Rome, preaching this wonderful good news of God. It's news I'm most proud to proclaim, this extraordinary Message of God's powerful plan to rescue everyone who trusts him, starting with Jews and then right on to everyone else! God's way of putting people right shows up in the acts of faith, confirming what Scripture has said all along: "The person in right standing before God by trusting him really lives."

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