

SAKLC CONVERSATIONS

Mid-week adult study at St Armands Key Lutheran Church, Sarasota, FL
"ROMANS, a letter for today"
Session Plan for Thursday, May 4, 2017

OPENING PRAYER (*group adaptation of the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi –to be spoken in unison*)

**Lord, make us instruments of your peace:
Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is discord, harmony; where there is error, truth;
Where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;
To be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning, that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying, that we are born to eternal life. AMEN.**

A SHARING OF GOD'S PEACE

FACILITATOR'S INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Arriving at Chapter 12 we see an important change in the Letter to the Romans! Having concluded his discourses concerning the "Good News" {the Gospel} (in chapters. 1-8) and having expressed his thoughts about God's dealings with Israel (in chapters 9-11) Paul moves to a discussion of the ethical implications of this Gospel. [This pattern shift is also seen in some other Pauline letters, like Galatians, where in chapters 5-6, drawing upon instructions previously set forth, there is a teaching about proper behavior in facing concrete situations within the community of faith.]

Here, in Romans 12, Paul begins with a plea that his readers present their bodies as living sacrifices and be transformed by the renewing of their minds, so that they can demonstrate in themselves that the will of God is good, acceptable, and perfect (1-2). He then moves on and encourages them to fulfill their proper place in the Body of Christ with proper humility and zeal (3-8). Finally, there are a list of commands which are to govern the Christian's life and attitude towards love, good and evil, brethren in the Lord, service to God, and response to persecution (9-21).

ROMANS 12

A CONTEMPORARY READING OF THE TEXT: *from THE MESSAGE TRANSLATION*

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Place Your Life before God

¹⁻² So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he

wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

³ I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him. ⁴⁻⁶ In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't. ⁶⁻⁸ If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face.

⁹⁻¹⁰ Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle. ¹¹⁻¹³ Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality. ¹⁴⁻¹⁶ Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody. ¹⁷⁻¹⁹ Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it." ²⁰⁻²¹ Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.

OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION:

1) To enable participants to see the difference between conformation and transformation, and understanding the process involved in being transformed.

2) To enable participants to appreciate and honor the diversity of individual gifts in the Body of Christ, and to use them for the building of the community that is Christ's Church.

3) To discuss Paul's understanding of how love applies to our everyday life, especially in conflicted situations.

CLOSER EXAMINATION OF ROMANS 12 – using text from AMPLIFIED BIBLE

I. PAUL'S APPEAL TO CONSECRATION (1-2)

A. PRESENT YOUR BODIES AS LIVING SACRIFICES (vs.1)

1. In view of the mercies of God (1a)

Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies [dedicating all of yourselves, set apart] **as a living sacrifice^[*], holy and well-pleasing to God,**

[note from above *] *a living sacrifice* - an offering that is living, not dead – Under the Old Covenant, God accepted the sacrifices of dead animals. But because of Christ's ultimate sacrifice, those are no longer of any effect. For those in Christ, the only acceptable worship is to offer themselves completely to the Lord.

Compare: Psalm 19:14 "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer."

1 Peter 2:5 "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

2. Which is your reasonable (spiritual) service (1b)

which is your rational (logical, intelligent) **act of worship.**

In light of all the spiritual riches believers enjoy as the fruit of God's mercies, it logically flows that they owe God their highest form of service. Understood here is the idea of priestly, spiritual service, which was an integral part of Old Testament worship.

B. BE TRANSFORMED, NOT CONFORMED TO THE WORLD (vs.2)

1. By the renewing of your mind (2a)

And do not be conformed to this world [any longer with its superficial values and customs], **but be^[*] transformed and progressively changed** [as you mature spiritually] **by the renewing of your mind** [focusing on godly values and ethical attitudes],

[note above*] This verb is from the Greek word meaning "*metamorphosis*." It refers to the process that leads to an outward, permanent change. Matthew uses the same Greek word to describe the Transfiguration. Just as Christ briefly displayed His inner divine nature and glory at the Transfiguration, Christians should outwardly manifest their inner, redeemed natures, not once, but daily!

[some further notes]

- **CONFORM** normally means-"to fashion or shape one thing like another... but, this Greek verb has reference to that which is transitory, changeable, unstable" - the word is very different than that found and used earlier in **Romans 8:29**, which passage reads: "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many believers."
- **TRANSFORM** as used here means "to change into another form; to undergo a complete change, which under the power of God, will find expression in a person's character and conduct"

2. To prove the good, acceptable, and perfect will God (2b)

so that you may prove [for yourselves] **what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect** [in His plan and purpose for you].

The things that displeased God in the days of the Old Testament are still what displease Him today. God wants us to be as holy as He is holy!

II. SERVE GOD AS MEMBERS OF ONE BODY (3-8)

A. WITH HUMILITY (vs.3)

1. In all seriousness (3a)

For by the grace [of God] **given to me I say to everyone of you not to think more highly of himself** [and of his importance and ability] **than he ought to think;**

Paul here addresses 2 dangers that an individual faces in the exercise of her/his spiritual gifts. He/she might overestimate him/herself and try to exercise a gift God had never bestowed; or, she/he might underestimate and fail to exercise the gift that God has given.

2. For what we are comes from God (3b)

but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has apportioned to each a degree of faith [and a purpose designed for service]

Faith, here, is not 'saving faith' but rather faithful stewardship, the kind and quantity required to use one's own particular gift.

Compare: **1 Corinthians 12:7-9** "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit. To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit."

B. WITH APPRECIATION FOR DIVERSITY (vss.4-5)

1. Members do not have the same function (4)

For just as in one [physical] **body we have many parts, and these parts do not all have the same function or special use,**

2. But we are one, members of one another (5)

so we, who are many, are [nevertheless just] **one body in Christ, and individually** [we are] **parts one of another** [mutually dependent on each other].

This emphasis on 'many members; one body' also found in [1 Corinthians 12:12-14](#); [Ephesians 5:30](#)

C. WITH ZEAL, NO MATTER WHAT OUR GIFTS (6-8)

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to use them accordingly: if [someone has the gift of] **prophecy,** [let him speak a new message from God to His people] **in proportion to the faith possessed;** ⁷ **if service, in the act of serving; or he who teaches, in the act of teaching;** ⁸ **or he who encourages, in the act of encouragement; he who gives, with generosity; he who leads,** [^{*}] **with diligence; he who shows mercy** [in for others], **with cheerfulness.**

'Prophecy' (vs. 6) means speaking forth and does not necessarily include the element of being able to predict the future or any other mystical and/or supernatural aspects.

What is meant (vs.6) "in proportion to the faith possessed?" – The utterances of the 'prophet' were not to fluctuate to his own impulses or independent thoughts, but were to be in accordance with the truth revealed to that person as a believer. Since Reformation times this phrase has often been used to mean that all Scripture is to be interpreted with reference to all other Scripture

[note * - "without ulterior motives"]

The emphasis, above, is not on believers' identifying their gift perfectly, but on faithfully using the unique enablement God has given each. The gifts are like an artist's palette of basic colors, from which God selects to blend a unique 'hue' for each disciple's life.

'Cheerfulness' – is an attitude crucial to ensure that the gift of mercy becomes a genuine help, not a discouraging commiseration with those who are suffering!

III. MISCELLANEOUS EXHORTATIONS (9-21)

A. AS CHRISTIANS (9-16)

1. Concerning love, good and evil (9)

Love is to be sincere and active [the real thing—without guile and hypocrisy]. **Hate what is evil** [detest all ungodliness, do not tolerate wickedness]; **hold on tightly to what is good.**

2. Loving and honoring brethren (10)

Be devoted to one another with [authentic] **brotherly affection** [as members of one family], **give preference to one another in honor;**

[John 13:34-35](#) "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another."

3. Fervent in our service (11)

never lagging behind in diligence; aglow in the Spirit, enthusiastically serving the Lord;

Whatever a Christian does in this life is worth doing with enthusiasm and care. Indifference not only prevents good, but allows evil to prosper.

4. Rejoicing, patient, prayerful (12)

constantly rejoicing in hope [because of our confidence in Christ], **steadfast and patient in distress, devoted to prayer** [continually seeking wisdom, guidance, and strength],

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”

5. Caring for saints (13)

contributing to the needs of God’s people, pursuing [the practice of] **hospitality.**

This statement is in reference to strangers and not merely entertaining one’s friends. In New Testament times, travel was dangerous, inns were evil places, lodging was scarce and expensive. So the early believers often opened their homes to travelers, especially to fellow believers.

6. Blessing our enemies (14)

Bless those who persecute you [who cause you harm or hardship]; **bless and do not curse** [them].

Matthew 5:44 – “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”

1 Peter 2:23 – “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.”

7. Sharing joys and sorrows (15)

Rejoice with those who rejoice [sharing others’ joy], **and weep with those who weep** [sharing others’ grief].

1 Corinthians 12:26 – “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice in it!”

8. Humble in our relations together (16)

Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty [conceited, self-important, exclusive], **but associate with humble people** [those with a realistic self-view]. **Do not overestimate yourself.**

1 Corinthians 13:1-4 – “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. ⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.”

B. RESPONDING TO EVIL (17-21)

1. Do not repay with evil, be mindful of what is good (17)

Never repay anyone evil for evil. Take thought for what is right *and* gracious *and* proper in the sight of everyone.

Matthew 5:39 – “But I say unto you, that you resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

2. If possible, be at peace (18)

If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

3. Give place to the wrath of God (19)

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave the way open for God’s wrath [and His judicial righteousness]; **for it is written** [in Scripture], **“VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,”** says the Lord.

In vss. 18 & 19 we see that God will take care of those who are abusive toward us. We do not have to fight someone who is out to destroy us; God will do it for us. A really simple way to say this is, kill them with kindness!

4. Overcome evil by responding with good (20-21)

BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM; IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR BY DOING THIS YOU WILL HEAP [*] BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.” ²¹ **Do not be overcome *and* conquered by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

[NOTE * This may refer to an ancient Egyptian custom in which a penitent person carried a bowl of burning embers on his head to show his shame and guilt. By analogy, being kind to an enemy may lead him to shame and repentance.]

This is the very same scripture that we read in Proverbs 25:21-22 and Matthew 5:44-45.

DISCUSSION/INDIVIDUAL/GROUP QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the main points of Romans 12?
- 2) Upon what does Paul make his plea?
- 3) How is one transformed?
- 4) What is the purpose of such transformation?
- 5) What illustration shows our dependence upon each other in the church?
- 6) How are Christians to respond to evil?