

SAKLC CONVERSATIONS

Mid-week adult study at St Armands Key Lutheran Church, Sarasota, FL
"ROMANS, a letter for today"
Session Plan for Thursday, May 11, 2017

OUR OBJECTIVES in this session:

1. To understand a Christian's relationship to the government (chap. 13)
2. To appreciate the importance of love and moral purity (chap. 13)
3. To learn how those who are strong/weak should deal with one another (chap. 14)

THE BIBLICAL TEXT: all passages quoted in this study outline are from - The Message translation (MSG)

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TEXT – PART ONE - ROMANS 13:1-7

(Quick Summary) In this portion of Paul's Letter, the apostle continues to provide instruction concerning the "transformed life," beginning with a focus on the Christian's submission to, and his/her responsibilities to governmental authorities. Paul's understanding is that all governments are in power due to God's providence and that they serve as God's ministers to avenge evil. This submission involves the paying of taxes and having respect for those in authority. The passage takes this form when outlined:

A) RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE GOVERNMENT [1-7]

- 1) Be in subjection [1-5]
 - a) Governing authorities are appointed by God [1-2]
 - b) Governing authorities are God's ministers to avenge evil [3-4]
 - c) To avoid wrath and maintain good conscience [5]
- 2) Fulfill what is due [6-7]
 - a) Taxes and customs [6-7a]
 - b) Fear (respect), honor [7b]

1-3 Be a good citizen. All governments are under God. Insofar as there is peace and order, it's God's order. So live responsibly as a citizen. If you're irresponsible to the state, then you're irresponsible with God, and God will hold you responsible. Duly constituted authorities are only a threat if you're trying to get by with something. Decent citizens should have nothing to fear.

3-5 Do you want to be on good terms with the government? Be a responsible citizen and you'll get on just fine, the government working to your advantage. But if you're breaking the rules right and left, watch out. The police aren't there just to be admired in their uniforms. God also has an interest in keeping order, and he uses them to do it. That's why you must live responsibly—not just to avoid punishment but also because it's the right way to live.

6-7 That's also why you pay taxes—so that an orderly way of life can be maintained. Fulfill your obligations as a citizen. Pay your taxes, pay your bills, respect your leaders.

FACILITATOR'S FURTHER COMMENTS:

For some people, these opening sentences of ROMANS 13 are very surprising! Paul is here advocating absolute obedience on the part of the Christian to civil powers and civil authorities. Actually, this is a commandment found in other places in the Bible, and not just in the New Testament; nor solely those passages of Pauline authorship. To wit, look at the following references:

Proverbs 14:35 – *“A servant who deals wisely has the king’s favor, but his wrath falls on one who acts shamefully.”*

1 Timothy 2:1-2 – *“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.”*

Titus 3:1 – *“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work.”*

1 Peter 2:13-17 – *“For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God’s will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. ¹⁶ As servants of God, live as free people; yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”*

There is an almost immediate temptation to conclude that these passages were written at a time that came before the Roman government had begun to hunt down and openly persecute Christians. We know from reading the Acts of the Apostles that the tribunals of civil magistrates were often the safest refuge that Christians had against the fury of Jewish mobs. Time and time again, while making his missionary journeys, Paul received special protection and justice because he was a Roman citizen. In early histories of the church there is also evidence that Christian leaders were saying much the same thing as Paul [*i.e. Justin Martyr; Athenagoras*]. It was the consistent teaching of early Christianity that obedience must be given to, and prayers must be made for, the civil power – even when the wielder of that power was a tyrannical ruler like Nero!

What is the thought and belief that supports this position? [A FEW SUGGESTIONS FROM YOUR FACILITATOR]

1. Paul probably stressed civil obedience because the Jews of his day were notoriously rebellious. Palestine, and especially the regions around Galilee, was constantly seething with insurrection. There were Zēalot̄s who believed there was no king for the Jews but Jehovah God. They believed that God would not be helping them unless they embarked on violent action to help themselves. Known as *“dagger-bearers,”* they were fanatical nationalists sworn to terrorist methods against the government as well as against individuals. Paul wished to disassociate himself completely from insurrectionist Judaism.
2. In Paul’s mind, no person can totally disassociate him/herself from society. No one can *“opt-out”* of a nation which regularly provides that person with benefits that otherwise could not be achieved by the individual apart from that society. As a person is an integral part of the Body of Christ {*Church*},

that person is also an integral part of the nation. There is no such thing as a totally isolated individual.

3. To the State a person owes protection. It was the Platonic idea that the State existed for the sake of justice, security and safety. Ordinary people enjoy a wide range of services provided by the State, that would otherwise not be enjoyed. These are the kind of things that are only obtainable when individuals covenant to live together in an ordered society. Paul believed that a Christian is bound by honor to be a good citizen and to take part in all the duties of citizenship.
4. Paul saw the State as an “*instrument*” in the hand of God; the State preserved the world from chaos; those who administered the State were playing their part in that great task. Whether they knew it or not, they were doing God’s work; and, it was a Christian’s duty to help; not to hinder!

DISCUSSION:

- A) Since God alone is declared to be the sovereign ruler of the universe, bestowing his “*power*” to be exercised by human authorities: are we correct in concluding that this passage *should/should not* be applied to each of the following relationships? - -
- I) The Government over all citizens;
 - II) The Church over believers;
 - III) Parents over children;
 - IV) Bosses over employees.
- B) Does God ordain a specific form of government? (*monarchy; democracy; dictatorship*)
- C) May a Christian – in good conscience – salute, pledge allegiance, or bow to the flag or to a civil ruler? Would it depend on the significance of the act? If so, what significance should be considered?
- D) If all people were Christians, would we still need rulers to execute justice? Should differences between Christians be taken before civil authorities?

THE MATTER OF CONSCIENCE is described in vs. 5. Some biblical translations actually make use of that word. The point being that we need - *out of a sense of obligation to God* – to keep a clear conscience to follow Him, not merely to avoid punishment from civil authorities. This point, too, is encountered elsewhere in Scripture:

Psalm 37:31 – “*The law of their God is in their hearts; their steps do not slip.*”

2 Corinthians 1:12 – “*Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God—and all the more toward you.*”

Hebrews 10:16 - “*This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds,*”

PAYMENT OF TAXES – [*The Greek word used here referred specifically to the taxes paid by individuals, particularly those living in a conquered nation, to their foreign rulers – which made those taxes even more*

distasteful!]. Taxes were usually a combination of income/property tax. There was a ground tax, paid either in cash or in kind, 1/10th of all the grain produced; 1/5th of the wine and fruit produced on that piece of ground. Income tax represented payment of 1% of total income. Poll Tax {ages 14-65} Additionally, we know that there were customs duties, taxes for use of roads/bridges; tax for the right to possess an animal; or, to drive a cart/wagon. Jesus, during his ministry, explicitly taught that taxes were to be paid, even to the pagan Roman government. He provided an example by willingly paying the Temple Tax:

Matthew 17:24-27 – “When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax came to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the temple tax?”²⁵ He said, “Yes, he does.” And when he came home, Jesus spoke of it first, asking, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their children or from others?”²⁶ When Peter said, “From others,” Jesus said to him, “Then the children are free.²⁷ However, so that we do not give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook; take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a coin; take that and give it to them for you and me.”

TEXT – PART TWO - ROMANS 13:8-14 –

*(Quick Summary) Herein, Paul deals with the importance of love and moral purity. Christians are to be indebted to no one, except to love one another. When love is properly demonstrated, even the requirements of the Law are properly met. This admonition to love is balanced with a reminder that time is short and it is imperative that Christians maintain moral purity. This is done by “*putting on the Lord Jesus*” and not making provision for the fulfilling of fleshly lusts.*

[THIS SESSION’S UNDERLYING OUTLINE CONTINUES](#)from page #1:

B) AN EXHORTATION TO LOVE and MORAL PURITY [8-14]

1) The Value of Love [8a]

2) Love does not harm, and fulfills the Law [8b-10]

C) CONCERNING MORAL PURITY [11-14]

1) The Time is short; cast off the works of darkness; put on armor of light [11-12]

2) Walk properly – by putting on the Lord Jesus; make no provision for fleshly desires [13-14]

8-10 Don’t run up debts, except for the huge debt of love you owe each other. When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along. The law code—don’t sleep with another person’s spouse, don’t take someone’s life, don’t take what isn’t yours, don’t always be wanting what you don’t have, and any other “don’t” you can think of—finally adds up to this: Love other people as well as you do yourself. You can’t go wrong when you love others. When you add up everything in the law code, the sum total is love.

11-14 But make sure that you don’t get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can’t afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing

everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!

TEXT for COMPARISON – ROMANS 13:11-14 – NRSV translation

¹¹ Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹² the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³ let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

YOUR FACILITATOR'S FURTHER COMMENTS:

Interestingly, Paul now turns to the matter of private debts. This Scripture is not a prohibition against borrowing money, but Paul is telling us that we need to pay the obligations when they become due! There were some people who twisted the petition of the Lord's Prayer, "*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,*" into a reason for claiming total absolution from all debts and money obligations. Paul had to remind his readers that Christianity does not mean an excuse for refusing our financial obligations! Then he moves to speak about the debt of love to each other, which must be paid daily. It is Paul's claim that if a person honestly seeks to discharge this debt of love, all of the other commandments will be kept automatically!

THE COMMAND TO LOVE is repeated many times in Scripture. God set the example of love when He gave Jesus to die on the cross for us. God's love – AGAPE LOVE – asks nothing in return. It is perfect love!

Mark 12:30-31 "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.*" ³¹ *The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* There is no other commandment greater than these."

SHORTNESS OF TIME is something that seems to have haunted Paul. But it was more than chronological time that Paul is speaking about here. Both he and the early church expected Christ's Second Coming, and therefore there was an urgency to be ready. The salvation to which he makes reference points to our glorification at the time of our death. When Jesus returns, we will be glorified and that time draws nearer with each passing day. The Bible frequently uses the return of Jesus to motivate believers to holy living:

Ecclesiastes 9:10 – "*Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.*"

Matthew 24:42 – "*Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day^[a] your Lord is coming.*"

1 Thessalonians 5:5-8 – "*For you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.* ⁶ *So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober;* ⁷ *for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night.* ⁸ *But since we*

belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”

SIX SINS are listed by Paul (vs. 14) as being typical of the Christ-less life:

1. In Greek: “KOMOS” usually translated “frivolity” or “revelry.” – Originally a ‘komos’ was the band of friends who accompanied a victor home after winning in the Greek games; singing that victorious athlete’s praises and celebrating his triumph as they went. Later the word was used of a noisy band of troublemakers sweeping through city streets under cover of darkness.
2. In Greek: “METHE” – “drunkenness.” For the Greeks, being intoxicated was a disgraceful thing, even though they were known as a wine-drinking people – largely because of polluted water supplies.. The wine most Greeks – even children - drank was diluted.
3. In Greek: “KOITE” – “immorality.” Literally it means a bed. The word has in it the meaning of the desire for the “forbidden bed.”
4. In Greek: “ASELGEIA” – “shamelessness.” It is one of the ugliest of Greek words, describing not only immorality, but describing the person who has lost all sense of shame; a person who does not care whether he/she is seen or discovered. A person no longer caring about personal honor, reputation, decency, etc.
5. In Greek: “ERIS” – “contention.” Eris is the spirit born of unbridled and unholy competition. It comes from the desire for place, power and prestige; from the inability and lack of willingness to ever take “second place.”
6. In Greek: “ZELOS” – “envy.” Can be applied in 2 ways – (i) to describe the noble emulation of someone of great character (ii) can also describe the grudging envy of someone who is not content with his/her own life and who looks with great jealousy on every blessing given to someone else.

DISCUSSION:

1. How do people sometimes make provisions to fulfill fleshly desires?
2. Are we wrong just to commit overtly sinful actions, or is it wrong to do things that encourage or enable sinful acts?

TEXT – PART THREE - ROMANS 14:1 – 13

(Quick Summary) In the opening half of Romans 14, Paul discusses the relationship strong and weak brothers/sisters are to have toward each other. He admonishes the strong to be careful in their dealings with those whose faith and knowledge is weak, and for the weak not to judge what God allows. In such matters each brother/sister should be true to conscience and do what they do as service rendered to the Lord. There is no place for condemning or despising one another in these matters, for Jesus will be the judge. Of primary concern is not to put stumbling blocks in a brother’s/sister’s way.

[THIS SESSION’S UNDERLYING OUTLINE CONTINUES](#)from page 4

D) ADMONITIONS GIVEN TO STRONG/WEAK BROTHERS/SISTERS (14:1-13)

- 1) How to treat each other [vss. 1-4]
 - a) The strong are to receive and not despise the weak [1-3a]
 - b) The weak are not to judge those God approves [3b-4]
- 2) How to be true to the Lord in these matters [vss. 5-9]
 - a) Be fully convinced in your own mind [5]
 - b) Do what you do as to the Lord [6-9]
- 3) Do not judge one another [vss. 10-13]
 - a) Christ is to be our Judge [10-13a]
 - b) Our concern should not be to put stumbling blocks in a brother/sister's way [13b]

Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with—even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently.

²⁻⁴ For instance, a person who has been around for a while might well be convinced that he can eat anything on the table, while another, with a different background, might assume he should only be a vegetarian and eat accordingly. But since both are guests at Christ's table, wouldn't it be terribly rude if they fell to criticizing what the other ate or didn't eat? God, after all, invited them both to the table. Do you have any business crossing people off the guest list or interfering with God's welcome? If there are corrections to be made or manners to be learned, God can handle that without your help.

⁵ Or, say, one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience.

⁶⁻⁹ What's important in all this is that if you keep a holy day, keep it for God's sake; if you eat meat, eat it to the glory of God and thank God for prime rib; if you're a vegetarian, eat vegetables to the glory of God and thank God for broccoli. None of us are permitted to insist on our own way in these matters. It's God we are answerable to—all the way from life to death and everything in between—not each other. That's why Jesus lived and died and then lived again: so that he could be our Master across the entire range of life and death, and free us from the petty tyrannies of each other.

¹⁰⁻¹² So where does that leave you when you criticize a brother? And where does that leave you when you condescend to a sister? I'd say it leaves you looking pretty silly—or worse. Eventually, we're all going to end up kneeling side by side in the place of judgment, facing God. Your critical and condescending ways aren't going to improve your position there one bit. Read it for yourself in Scripture:

**"As I live and breathe," God says,
"every knee will bow before me;
Every tongue will tell the honest truth
that I and only I am God."**

So tend to your knitting. You've got your hands full just taking care of your own life before God.

¹³⁻¹⁴ Forget about deciding what's right for each other. Here's what you need to be concerned about: that you don't get in the way of someone else, making life more difficult than it already is. I'm convinced—Jesus convinced me!—that everything as it is in itself is holy. We, of course, by the way we treat it or talk about it, can contaminate it.

YOUR FACILITATOR'S FURTHER COMMENTS:

In this chapter Paul appears to be dealing with a local problem that he must have heard and/or been consulted about in the Church at Rome. There were 2 lines of thought: (i) there were some people who believed that – in Christian liberty – old taboos were gone; that old dietary laws were now irrelevant; that special observances were no longer required. (ii) On the other hand there were people {"legalists"}, who were full of scruples; who believed in maintaining the strict dietary laws of the past; who believed that observances should be carried out as they had been for hundreds of previous years! This problem is not one confined to the days of Paul. To this day, in the Church, there are varying points of view! There are broader – more liberal – viewpoints; persons who see no harm in many things that go on in congregations. And, there are "conservatives," those who hold narrower and stricter points of view –who are sometimes shocked and offended by things in which "liberals" see no harm.

Paul's sympathies are clearly with the wider liberal point of view; but, at the same time, he says that when one of these weaker and narrower brothers/sisters comes into the church, that person must be received with due sympathy. There are three attitudes we must avoid:

1. An attitude of IRRITATION. However much we may disagree, however much we may differ, we must first try to see the other person's viewpoint, to sympathize and understand.
2. An attitude of RIDICULE. No person remains unwounded when that which she/he thinks precious is laughed at.
3. An attitude of CONTEMPT. A person's views are his/her own and must be treated with respect. It is impossible to win someone over to "our" position unless we have genuine respect for him/her.

FINAL POINT OF DISCUSSION:

1. Can you identify ways that fellow brothers/sisters of faith might be guilty of causing "stumbling blocks" in today's church?
2. Is a person guilty just because other people do not like what is done, or are upset by it?