

SAKLC CONVERSATIONS

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

“ROMANS, a letter for today”

Session Plan for Thursday, May 18, 2017

ROMANS WRAP-UP *{final session}*

AN OPENING PRAYER

OUR OBJECTIVES in this session:

1. To quickly summarize the message contained in the final chapters of Romans.
2. To review Paul’s counsel on dealings both with the “weak” and the “strong.”
3. To think realistically about applying Paul’s teaching to contemporary life situations where Christians may not always agree about the requirements of their faith.

FACILITATOR’S INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

In this final session of our study of Paul’s Letter to the Romans, some issues reappear that we have discussed earlier. As Paul was writing, he was obviously deeply troubled about the overall unity of the church. He was distressed to the core of his being about the fractiousness existing in many of the churches which he had founded in Asia Minor. He was appalled when other traveling evangelists attacked the truth of the gospel that he, Paul, had preached, and they went about proclaiming a much different message. For Paul it was not enough to simply affirm the truth of the gospel; he wanted to change the way that members of the church were behaving, most especially in their relationships one to another. The split that existed between Jews and Gentiles was very real! Paul’s best efforts to hold these groups together ultimately failed. From history we know that by the second century, Gentile churches had more and more separated themselves from Jewish-Christian churches. One wonders: If Paul were still alive today, what would his assessment be about the unity, or lack thereof, in modern 21st-century Christendom?

The last half of Romans chapter 14 focuses on the importance of being true to one's own principles, and not encourage a weaker brother to violate his own conscience. Things harmless within themselves can destroy those whose consciences do not permit them. So, Paul teaches that those who understand the true nature of the kingdom of God will be willing to forego personal liberties to maintain peace and build up their weaker brethren.

In Romans chapter 15:1-13 Paul’s discussions continue on how those who are strong are to receive and bear with the infirmities of the weak. Encouraging the strong to be concerned with uplifting the weak, he reminds them of Christ and His unselfishness. Reminding them of the value of the Old Testament Scriptures, he pleads for patience so that with one mind and one mouth they may glorify God. Finally, Paul calls for them to receive one another to the glory of God, just as Christ served both Jews and Gentiles in fulfilling the prophets of old. Then, Paul

offers a prayer that God might fill them with joy and peace in believing, so that they may abound in hope with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Many of you have found the outlines from our previous sessions to be a helpful tool in reading Scripture; now, consider the following outline which analyzes the structure of the text from **Romans 14:14 through chapter 15:13** -

PAUL'S ADMONITIONS TO STRONG BRETHERN (Romans 14:13-15:13)

A. DO NOT DESTROY A BROTHER FOR WHOM CHRIST DIED (vss. 14-18)

1. Food is harmless in itself, but we can misuse it to the destruction of those who are weak (vss.14-16)
2. The kingdom of God is more important than food and drink (vss. 17-18)

B. PURSUE THINGS WHICH MAKE FOR PEACE (vss.19-23)

1. Build up your brother; don't destroy him over food (vss.19-20)
2. Be willing to forego your liberties for the sake of your brother (vs. 21)
3. Appreciate the importance of a clear conscience in your weak brother (vss. 22-23)

C. BEAR WITH THE SCRUPLES OF THE WEAK (Romans 15:1-6)

1. Try to please your brethren, as Christ did (vss.1-3)
2. With the help of God and Scripture, be patient, so you may with one mind and mouth glorify God (4-6)

D. RECEIVE ONE ANOTHER (7-12)

1. As Christ received us, to the glory of God (vs. 7)
2. As Christ served Jews and Gentiles, in fulfillment of prophecy (vss. 8-12)

E. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THEM (13)

1. That God might fill them with all joy and peace in believing (13a)
2. That they might abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (13b)

THE BIBLICAL TEXT- ROMANS 14:13 – 15:13 from - The Message translation (MSG)

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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.

15-16 If you confuse others by making a big issue over what they eat or don't eat, you're no longer a companion with them in love, are you? These, remember, are persons for whom Christ died. Would you

risk sending them to hell over an item in their diet? Don't you dare let a piece of God-blessed food become an occasion of soul-poisoning!

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ God's kingdom isn't a matter of what you put in your stomach, for goodness' sake. It's what God does with your life as he sets it right, puts it together, and completes it with joy. Your task is to single-mindedly serve Christ. Do that and you'll kill two birds with one stone: pleasing the God above you and proving your worth to the people around you.

¹⁹⁻²¹ So let's agree to use all our energy in getting along with each other. Help others with encouraging words; don't drag them down by finding fault. You're certainly not going to permit an argument over what is served or not served at supper to wreck God's work among you, are you? I said it before and I'll say it again: All food is good, but it can turn bad if you use it badly, if you use it to trip others up and send them sprawling. When you sit down to a meal, your primary concern should not be to feed your own face but to share the life of Jesus. So be sensitive and courteous to the others who are eating. Don't eat or say or do things that might interfere with the free exchange of love.

²²⁻²³ Cultivate your own relationship with God, but don't impose it on others. You're fortunate if your behavior and your belief are coherent. But if you're not sure, if you notice that you are acting in ways inconsistent with what you believe—some days trying to impose your opinions on others, other days just trying to please them—then you know that you're out of line. If the way you live isn't consistent with what you believe, then it's wrong.

¹⁵ ¹⁻² Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?"

³⁻⁶ That's exactly what Jesus did. He didn't make it easy for himself by avoiding people's troubles, but waded right in and helped out. "I took on the troubles of the troubled," is the way Scripture puts it. Even if it was written in Scripture long ago, you can be sure it's written for us. God wants the combination of his steady, constant calling and warm, personal counsel in Scripture to come to characterize us, keeping us alert for whatever he will do next. May

our dependably steady and warmly personal God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us all. Then we'll be a choir—not our voices only, but our very lives singing in harmony in a stunning anthem to the God and Father of our Master Jesus!

7-13 So reach out and welcome one another to God's glory. Jesus did it; now you do it! Jesus, staying true to God's purposes, reached out in a special way to the Jewish insiders so that the old ancestral promises would come true for them. As a result, the non-Jewish outsiders have been able to experience mercy and to show appreciation to God. Just think of all the Scriptures that will come true in what we do! For instance:

Then I'll join outsiders in a hymn-sing; I'll sing to your name!

And this one:

Outsiders and insiders, rejoice together!

And again:

**People of all nations, celebrate God!
All colors and races, give hearty praise!**

And Isaiah's word:

**There's the root of our ancestor Jesse,
breaking through the earth and growing tree tall,
Tall enough for everyone everywhere to see and take hope!**

Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!

A PERSONAL/GROUP EXERCISE:

1. Rather than reviewing each verse of the text in our usual fashion, please skim the above text and mark a phrase or verse that speaks meaningfully to you.
2. Each person will be invited to read his/her selected verse without the need for further comment.
3. In Romans 14:13, Paul writes: ***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. Below are listed several real life scenarios. In small groups discuss how the Apostle Paul's Scriptural advice should apply to these situations:

- A. Should I hide my wine when my teetotaler brother-in-law comes to visit?***
- B. Should I crusade with others who are living in my community seeking to ban little league baseball practice and games on Sunday mornings?***
- C. Should I serve meat when entertaining friends who are known to be vegetarians?***
- D. Should I attend the marriage ceremony of my granddaughter who is marrying a practicing Buddhist?***
- E. Should I warmly welcome my new daughter-in-law into my home; she and my son, both of them previously married, divorced their former spouses in order to marry each other?***

and now what about ... the rest of Romans?

Facilitator's Closing Comments:

Midway in Romans 15, Paul begins to draw his Letter to a close by making remarks concerning his apostleship and plans to see them. Recognizing their own abilities in the faith, he still felt it appropriate to write to them as he did. Speaking of his design not to preach where Christ had already been received, Paul tells of his plan to come to Rome on his way to Spain. But first, he is going to the poor saints in Jerusalem with a contribution from the saints in Macedonia and Achaia. Realizing the danger such a trip entails, he asks to be remembered in their prayers.

Then, in chapter 16, Paul closes with miscellaneous instructions, greetings, warnings, and a doxology. Of particular note are his comments concerning Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. Also, his greetings to Priscilla and Aquila remind us of how instrumental this couple was in the spread of the gospel. The remaining greetings from Paul remind us that there were many others who contributed to the growth of the church in the first century.

A final warning is given against those who would cause divisions and occasions of stumbling contrary to what Paul had taught in this epistle. For above everything else, Paul wanted to

ensure their continued obedience in the gospel. Paul's companions at Corinth add their greetings, and Paul closes this wonderful letter with an expression of praise to God for the revelation of the gospel which was leading to the obedience of faith among all nations.

ADDENDA:

Members of St. Armands Key Lutheran Church who have been the primary participants in this ongoing 5-month study of the Letter to the Romans are fully aware that concurrently (May 2017) the church's Interim Pastor, the Rev. Dr. Keith Copeland, has been leading a series of congregational workshops on the **Rule of Love**. Any person studying Paul's biblical teaching about love, the love that God has shown to us in Christ Jesus, is compelled to think about and practice that love in reaching out to others, particularly those who are part of the household of faith!

Dr. Calvin Roetzel, author of the study guide "Romans: A Letter for Today," which has been one of many resources used during the current study of Romans, has provided us, in his prepared material, with Ten Guidelines for Dealing with Church Conflict. Your study facilitator has prepared the present session well in advance of the development and endorsement of any final SAKLC document, and is not releasing the current Study Guide until the morning after the final SAKLC workshop. By including these guidelines, said Facilitator does not wish to unduly influence congregational decisions or actions. However, since these notes are being published after the final workshop, this list developed by the author, may provide you with a point of comparison:

TEN GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH CHURCH CONFLICT

1. Accept that we do disagree and that conflict is normal.

Conflict produces growth when it is handled in an open and healthy manner.

2. Be sensitive to differences.

Let us remember that God gave us two ears and one mouth with the suggestion that we listen twice as much as we talk. And let it begin with me!

3. Maintain mutual respect and charity.

No matter how ridiculous we think someone's opinion is or how wrong we think a decision has been, let us all trust that we are acting out of our best sense of integrity and our deep beliefs about what is right and true, according to our own understanding of scripture and Christian faith.

4. Take responsibility for your own feelings and opinions.

Avoid the "everyone is thinking" and "those people" kind of language. It is important that we speak for ourselves. We can do this by using "I language": "I think," "I saw," "I wish." "I language" enables us to express ourselves without putting other people on the defensive. (It works very well in marriages too.)

5. Seek the positive.

Look for areas that you feel good about in the church and focus on them.

6. Be informed.

When you hear something, check it out. Don't spread misinformation

7. Follow our church's bylaws and procedures.

Churches get in trouble when issues go underground and there is maneuvering behind the scenes. When we elect and install our board and committee members, we commit ourselves to support them. Support can include suggestions and complaints as well as praise. Share your ideas with them. Participate in meetings; debate freely. Remember, everyone is part of the process.

8. Express yourself honestly and freely. Don't gossip.

Gossip is based on idle, casual hearsay. It tends to be destructive and unaccountable. It is often exaggerated or fabricated. It is mixed up and tainted by our own frustrations and needs. And it can be deadly. Talk directly to the person involved, not behind someone's back.

9. Keep your perspective; maintain a sense of humor; lighten up; and accept the possibility that you may be wrong about something.

Commit yourself fully to what you think is right, but remember, you could be wrong.

10. Trust God.

This isn't just our church; it is God's church; and it is filled with the power and the Spirit and the truth of Jesus Christ. That doesn't mean we haven't made mistakes and that we won't make mistakes in the future. That doesn't mean that we won't continue to have our differences or that it will be easy to live with those differences. It does mean that when we place our trust in God instead of in ourselves, we will prevail.

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