

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, February 9, 2017

PSALM 51: 1-17 – spoken responsively

(Otherwise known as ‘King David’s Prayer for Pardon and Cleansing’)

(ALL) Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

(Men) For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

(Women) You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

(Men) Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

(Women) Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

(ALL) O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

OUR OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION:

1. To try to explain how God's judgement and wrath can be both good news and bad news.
2. To describe how both Jews and Gentiles know and yet violate the will of God.
3. To discuss the global dimensions of sin.

A) In the space below, can you Identify some criteria or standards for knowing **RIGHT** from **WRONG**:

B) What words or phrases come to your mind when you hear the word **sin**?

C) What words or phrases come to your mind when you hear the words **judgement** and **wrath**?

D) In **Romans 1:18 – 3:20**, Paul announces that God's judgment is already beginning! Paul was convinced that the end times were very near! This is a theme that is not "lost" on contemporary people! Can you identify any books, movies, or TV shows that have a judgement or "end-time" theme?

[Dr. Calvin Roetzel comments (RESOURCE BOOK – pg. 25) "Paul viewed the judge as no impassive figure above the fray, but as one actively interceding on behalf of the defenseless, the weak and helpless to raise them up. While the divine judge did act to punish evil doers, he also offered salvation and rescue. So when Paul spoke of the "*wrath of God now being revealed*," he spoke less about vengeance than about divine action to reclaim the world. Wrath is not only God's harsh response to dark and sinister powers, but also about God's active intervention on behalf of victims of injustice, or the power of sin, or senseless brutality, or sheer human cussedness. Wrath is, thus, good news for the lowly, powerless, and repentant, and bad news for dark and sinister powers."]

LOOK DIRECTLY @ THE BIBLICAL TEXT: ROMANS 1:18-32 (*The Guilt of Humankind*)

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory

of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, Godhaters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.

E) **"THE DAY OF THE LORD,"** as a biblical concept, is alluded to by Dr. Roetzel (RESOURCE BOOK PG. 25), when he states *"Paul announced that God's judgment is near, indeed it is already beginning. The great cosmic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness, between God and Satan..... The resurrection of Jesus signals the first strike of the midnight hour on the apocalyptic clock. This idea, "THE DAY OF THE LORD is a theme used in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, as in ***"The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come"*** (Joel 2:31, quoted in Acts 2:20).*

a) The concept was used first by Isaiah and subsequently incorporated into prophetic and apocalyptic literature texts of the Bible. [Isaiah 2:12 - ***"For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low."***] It relies on military images to describe the Lord as a "divine warrior" who will conquer his enemies.

b) In some specific prophetic texts of the Old Testament, the enemies of the Lord are Israel's enemies, and in these visions the day of the Lord brings victory for the people of ancient Israel. [In Amos 5:18-20 the prophets' hearers would have taken it to mean "the day when Yahweh would intervene to put Israel at the head of the nations, irrespective of Israel's faithfulness to Him."]

c) Other prophets use the imagery as a warning to Israel or its leaders and for them, the day of the Lord will mean destruction for the biblical nations of Israel and/or Judah. the day of the Lord is about God chastening his people, whether it be through the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem or a locust plague described in Joel 2:1-11. Yet Joel 2:32 holds a promise that on the Day of the Lord, "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."

d) "The Day of the Lord" - as a specific day - is found in the Book of Daniel 12:12, "Blessed is he who waits and comes unto 1,335 days."

e) Gradually, this concept developed throughout Jewish and Christian Scripture into a day of divine, apocalyptic judgment at the end of the world. The phrase is also used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 to refer to the return of Jesus.

F) CONCLUSION: "WRATH" – CAN SIMULTANEOUSLY BE GOOD and BAD NEWS!

a) '*wrath*' had vastly different connotations for Paul than it does for us!

b) Paul's use of the word reflects the O.T. understanding of God's '*wrath*' as being good news as well as bad

G) A FURTHER EXPLORATION OF ROMANS 1:18-32

I - The basis for God's wrath against the Gentiles and the fact that they are without excuse is that through their wickedness they suppress the obvious truth about God's eternal power and divine nature (1:18-20).

a) God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all the unrighteousness and wickedness of the Gentiles (1:18).

b) The Gentiles suppress the truth about God (1:18).

c) What can be known about God has been made plain to the Gentiles (1:19).

d) Since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen through what has been made (1:20).

e) The Gentiles are without excuse (1:20).

II- The basis for God's wrath against the Gentiles is that although they knew God, and claimed to be wise, they neither glorified him nor gave thanks to him, but instead they became futile in their thinking, darkened in their foolish heart, and exchanged the glory of God for idolatry (1:21-23).

a) The Gentiles knew God but did not glorify him or give thanks to him (1:21).

b) The Gentiles became futile in their reasonings and darkened in their foolish hearts (1:21).

c) Even though the Gentiles claimed to be wise, they became fools (1:22).

d) The Gentiles exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles (1:23).

III- The result of God's condemnation of the Gentiles for their suppression of the truth about his eternal power and divine nature is that he has given them over to their desires for impurity to the point where they have engaged in sexual perversion and have exchanged the truth about God for a lie, including the worship of creation instead of the Creator (1:24-25).

- a) God gave the Gentiles over to impurity and the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves (1:24).
- b) The Gentiles exchanged the truth of God—who is forever blessed—for a lie (1:25)
- c) The Gentiles worshipped and served the creation rather than the Creator (1:25).
- d) God is forever blessed (1:25).

IV- The result of God's condemnation of the Gentiles for their sexual perversity and idolatry was to give them over to further sexual immorality including homosexuality (1:26-27).

- a) God gave the Gentiles over to dishonorable passions (1:26).
- b) Gentile women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones (1:26).
- c) Gentile men abandoned natural relations with women and became inflamed in their passions for one another (1:27).
- d) These Gentiles received in themselves the due penalty for their error (1:27).

V- The result of God's condemnation of the Gentiles—since they judged it of no value to have God in their knowledge—was to give them over to their sin to the point where they have become full of it and encourage others to sin as well (1:28-32).

- a) The Gentiles did not see fit to acknowledge God (1:28).
- b) God gave the Gentiles over to a depraved mind, to do what should not be done (1:28).
- d) The Gentiles are filled with every kind of unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, and malice (1:29).
- d) The Gentiles are rife with envy, murder, strife, deceit, hostility (1:29).
- e) The Gentiles are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, contrivers of all sorts of evil, disobedient to parents, senseless, covenant-breakers, heartless, ruthless (1:29-31).
- f) The Gentiles know that God's righteous decree means death for those who practice such sin (1:32).
- g) The Gentiles continue to practice such sin and encourage others to practice it also (1:32).

FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How do we gain knowledge of God's will?
2. How have we sinned?
3. What excuses have we offered?
4. What are some examples of sin that are larger than personal sin?
5. How do global sins foster individual sins?
6. How does individual sin magnify the power of global sin?
7. How would you summarize the human condition as Paul portrays it in this section of ROMANS?

HELP from a modern translation: *"The Message"* [Eugene Petersen]

"Ignoring God Leads to a Downward Spiral"

But God's angry displeasure erupts as acts of human mistrust and wrongdoing and lying accumulate, as people try to put a shroud over truth. But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being. So nobody has a good excuse. What happened was this: People knew God perfectly well, but when they didn't treat him like God, refusing to worship him, they trivialized themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives. They pretended to know it all, but were illiterate regarding life. They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in his hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand.

So God said, in effect, "If that's what you want, that's what you get." It wasn't long before they were living in a pigpen, smeared with filth, filthy inside and out. And all this because they traded the true God for a fake god, and worshiped the god they made instead of the God who made them—the God we bless, the God who blesses us. Oh, yes!

Worse followed. Refusing to know God, they soon didn't know how to be human either—women didn't know how to be women, men didn't know how to be men. Sexually confused, they abused and defiled one another, women with women, men with men—all lust, no love.

And then they paid for it, oh, how they paid for it—emptied of God and love, godless and loveless wretches.

Since they didn't bother to acknowledge God, God quit bothering them and let them run loose. And then all hell broke loose: rampant evil, grabbing and grasping, vicious backstabbing. They made life hell on earth with their envy, wanton killing, bickering, and cheating. Look at them: mean-spirited, venomous, fork-tongued God-bashers. Bullies, swaggerers, insufferable windbags! They keep inventing new ways of wrecking lives. They ditch their parents when they get in the way. Stupid, slimy, cruel, cold-blooded. And it's not as if they don't know better. They know perfectly well they're spitting in God's face. And they don't care—worse, they hand out prizes to those who do the worst things best!