

SAKLC CONVERSATIONS

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

“ROMANS, a letter for today”

Session Plan and “*facilitator’s study notes*” for
Thursday, March 2, 2017

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: ROMANS 6:1 – 7:6

OUR OBJECTIVES IN THIS SESSION

- 1) To understand Paul’s world view regarding the cosmic struggle between good and evil.
- 2) To attempt to understand many ways that we employ to defend ourselves today.
- 3) To look closely at Baptism in Paul’s time and see it as it was practiced in broader society and in the life of the early Christian church.
- 4) To identify and discuss the three (3) metaphors that Paul uses to answer the question: *“Should we continue to sin in order that grace may abound?”*
- 5) To apply Paul’s teaching regarding freedom in Christ to our everyday lives.

A SESSION OVERVIEW

Dr. Calvin J. Roetzel [RESOURCE BOOK AUTHOR] writes this about Romans 6:1 – 7:6

“In Paul’s world there were conflicting opinions about Gentiles. Attitudes of appreciation and mistrust existed side by side. Because he received Gentiles as converts, without requiring law observance as a pre-condition, Paul was accused of preaching a gospel of *“cheap grace.”* But Paul offered a vigorous defense of his practice and of the theology informing it. He summoned three (3) metaphors to counteract the charge that he was preaching a cut-rate gospel:”

A – Baptism

B – Slavery

C – Marriage and widowhood

AN INSTRUCTIVE and RESPONSIVELY SPOKEN OPENING DEVOTIONAL:

“THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM” (from: Martin Luther’s Small Catechism)

P: What is Baptism?

R/ Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's word.

P: Which is that word of God?

R/Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matt. 28:19)

P: What benefits does Baptism give?

R/It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

P: Which are these words and promises of God?

R/Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16)

P: How can water do such great things?

R/Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus, chapter three: "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying." (Titus 3:5-8)

P: What does such baptizing with water indicate?

R/It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

P: Where is this written?

R/St. Paul writes in Romans chapter six: "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Rom. 6:4)

PRAYER:

P: Gracious God, through water and the Spirit you have made us your own. You forgave us all of our sins and brought us to newness of life. Continue to strengthen us with your Holy Spirit and daily increase in us your gifts of grace: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of joy in your presence; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.
R/Amen.

A MUTUAL SHARING OF GOD’S PEACE



TODAY’S INITIAL TEXT (with interspersed comments): **ROMANS 6:1-4** – ***“What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! {in Greek: the strongest of terms is here employed to provide really special emphasis!} How can we who died to sin go on living in it? {A man who is dead is no longer affected by the things of this present life; we speak in modern-day terms of a person being ‘dead’ to sensual pleasures, to ambition, etc. to denote that they have lost their influence over that person} Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”***



FACILITATOR’S NOTE

In an earlier session (02-16-2017), when we discussed Romans 3, it was suggested that when reading Romans it is sometimes helpful to adopt a ***“trial mentality.”*** Today, that recommendation bears repetition! In the passage before us, Paul is once again carrying out an argument against a kind of imaginary opponent. The argument springs from the great saying at the end of the last chapter we studied (*Romans 5:20-21*): ***“But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*** In Paul’s mind the argument would run something like this:

The Objector: You have just said that God’s grace is great enough to find forgiveness for every sin.

Paul: That is so!

The Objector: You are, in fact, saying that God’s grace is the greatest and the most wonderful thing in all this world.

Paul: That is so!

The Objector: Well, if that is so, let us go on sinning. The more we sin the more grace will abound. Sin does not matter, for God will forgive anyway. In fact, we can go further than that and say that sin is an excellent thing, because sin gives the grace of God a chance to operate! The conclusion of your argument is that sin produces grace; therefore, sin is bound to be a good thing if it produces the greatest thing in all the world!

Paul, then goes on in **Romans 6:1-2** and recoils from that argument in sheer horror. **“What then are we to say?”**, he demands, **“should we continue to sin that grace may abound?” By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?”**

Paul then moves on to something else: **“Have you never thought,”** he demands, **“what happened to you when you were baptized?”**

[As we seriously pick up our study of today’s text, we must remember that baptism in the time of Paul was different from what baptism commonly means to most people in today’s society.]

A) Baptism – as a metaphor for Freedom in Christ & additional observations about 1st century Baptism:

1. It was adult baptism
 - a. The N.T. is not opposed to infant baptism; but infant baptism is the result of the Christian family; probably not yet a common reality in Paul’s time; in the early church people came to Christ as individuals, often leaving their families behind.
 - b. Baptism in early church was intimately connected with Confession of Faith; persons baptized when they entered the church. Those who entered came directly from paganism.
 - c. Baptism marked a dividing line in one’s life – a time of decision to cut one’s life in two:
 - often it was a mark of tearing away from one’s *roots*!
 - It represented in mind and in fact a *totally* new beginning!
2. It was baptism by total immersion
 - a. When a person descended into the water, and the water closed over his/her head, it was like being buried in a grave.
 - b. When that person emerged from the water, it was like rising from the grave.
3. Baptism was *symbolically* like dying and rising again
 - a. Death to the old life
 - b. Rising to new life in Christ
4. Jews understood the significance of baptism:
 - a. when a man entered Judaism from paganism, it involved -
 - sacrifice
 - circumcision
 - baptism
 - b. ancient Rabbis radically pronounced it as a *“complete change”* with *‘new’* rules applying to the rest of that person’s life.
5. Greeks also understood the significance of baptism
 - a. Indoctrination into mystery religions included -
 - course of instruction
 - ascetic discipline
 - a Right of initiation which included a *“death like”* component

Cautionary Note: Your Facilitator, in the points enumerated above, is not suggesting that Paul has borrowed his ideas/words from Jewish and/or pagan practices; what he is affirming is that Paul was using words and *“vivid word picture descriptions”* that both Jew and Gentile, alike, in his day would have clearly recognized and understood! Nor is it a purposeful intention to imply that total immersion was the only preferred mode of

baptism practiced. Paul's intent, totally apart from mode, was to state the obligation of Christians to be holy; that holiness arises from the fact of baptism, not from the method employed nor the person performing said baptism!

DISCUSSION:

1. Does our freedom in Christ, gained through baptism, mean that we will never sin again?
2. In what ways does baptism make **YOU** free?

Continuation of the text: **ROMANS 6:5-11** – ***“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self [see also Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9] was crucified {Paul here is referring to the pain and struggle which any human goes through when evil propensities are subdued} with him so that the body of sin {flesh} might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed {Greek: “justified”} from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. {This refers less to a future state than it does to the present state.} We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. {Free from its influence} The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”***

B) Three Great Truths to be derived from this passage:

1. It is a terrible thing to make the mercy of God an excuse for sinning.
 - a. in human terms it would be despicable for a child to intentionally commit crimes, because that child knew father/mother would automatically forgive; that would be *taking advantage of love to break love's heart.*
2. Anyone who enters upon Christianity is *committed* to a different kind of life.
 - a. That person is *'dead'* to one kind of life; *'born'* to another
 - b. Today, we have tended to accept the fact that acceptance as a Christian need not make a difference in a person's life.
 - c. Paul would have said *“it makes all the difference in the world!”*
 - d. Martin Luther wrote: *“Good works do not make a person good, but a good person does good works.”*
3. There is more than an ethical change when a person accepts Christ.
 - a. There is a real union with a real identification of being “in” Christ
 - b. To limit Christianity to an ethical demand, and to leave out this essential union with Christ, is to only get ½ the point.

B) Slavery – as a metaphor for Freedom in Christ & some additional observations:

The text: **ROMANS 6:12-23: *Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.***

What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Facilitator's Comments: In this passage, Paul contrasts the bad master (“*Master Sin*”) with the good master (“*the Righteousness of God*”). He makes the point that as a slave lives under the total and complete control of his master, so a Christian is a man who has given complete control of his life to Christ and who has held nothing back.

- a) Notice, too, how Paul personalizes sin: Sin appears as a supernatural power that rules over bodies, tyrannizes, enslaves, and pays ‘wages.’
- b) Elsewhere Paul speaks of Satan, the elemental spirits, principalities and powers that seek to dominate the world and crucify Christ.
- c) Paul is not talking here about sin as just a few little moral missteps. He is talking about sin on a world stage; a battlefield where good and evil are engaged in fierce warfare.

DISCUSSION:

1. To what persons, ideas, values, etc. might “we” (collectively and individually) be “slaves”?
2. Is it possible to simply “*be our own boss*,” that is, not to be “slave” to anything or anyone? Why or why not?
3. How does Paul use this metaphor of slavery to call us to exercise the freedom that we have in Christ?

C) Marriage and Widowhood – as a metaphor for Freedom in Christ:

The text: **ROMANS 7:1-6:**

Do you not know, brothers and sisters —for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only during that person’s lifetime? Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.

In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

Facilitator’s Comment: In this metaphor, the death of the husband freed the woman from the obligation to “bear fruit” (have children) in that relationship.

DISCUSSION:

1. What seems to be the main point of the metaphor of marriage and widowhood? *{Clue – consult final 2 paragraphs in your RESOURCE BOOK, pp. 48-49}*
2. How does Paul’s use of this metaphor call us to exercise the freedom that we have in Christ?
3. In this passage, Paul reflects on bearing “**fruit for God.**” A more complete enumeration of the “fruits of the Spirit” is found in Galatians; see below and note similarities (**bold print**) with Romans:

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT Galatians 5:13–25

For you were **called to freedom**, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love **become slaves to one another**. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall **love your neighbor as yourself**.” If however, **you bite and devour one another**, take care that you are not consumed by one another. **Live by the Spirit**, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ... Now the works of the flesh are obvious: **fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry ... enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, and dissensions ... envy, drunkenness, carousing**, and things like these. I am warning you, those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**. ... And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

SAKLC_CONVERSATIONS-ROMANS_2017.03.02_per hjm