

# 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 16, 2017

### OPENING PASTORAL PRAYER

### AN EXCHANGE OF GOD’S PEACE

**A BRIEF REVIEW** (Working with your fellow participants, and on the basis of our study of ROMANS over the last 8 weeks, try to fill in the blanks of the 4 paragraphs below)

The Apostle Paul came from the city of \_\_\_\_\_. His first language was \_\_\_\_\_. He was raised as a good \_\_\_\_\_. Before he became a follower of Jesus Christ, he \_\_\_\_\_ Christians. After he became a believer, he did/did not reject his Jewish faith. Paul believed the mission to which Christ called him was to \_\_\_\_\_.

In his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul announces that God’s judgment is near. All will face judgment, for all have had the opportunity to know God’s will. Gentiles know God’s will through \_\_\_\_\_. Jews know God’s will through \_\_\_\_\_. But. Even though all people know God’s will, no one \_\_\_\_\_.

“Righteousness,” “Justification,” or “right relationship with God” are all different ways to translate the same Greek word. Our “righteousness” comes about through the action of \_\_\_\_\_. By sending \_\_\_\_\_, God \_\_\_\_\_. We know or claim “righteousness” or “Salvation” by \_\_\_\_\_. Paul used Abraham as an example of a person who was made righteous because of his \_\_\_\_\_.

Sin was introduced into the world by \_\_\_\_\_. Paul calls Christ a Second \_\_\_\_\_. because \_\_\_\_\_. Paul believed that sin was so powerful that human beings were \_\_\_\_\_ to sin. But through the faithfulness of \_\_\_\_\_, we gain freedom from Sin. Freedom from Sin does not mean we will never sin again. Freedom from sin means \_\_\_\_\_

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## OBJECTIVES OF TODAY'S SESSION:

1. To identify three [3] possible ways of understanding Paul's use of the first-person "I" in Romans 7:7-25.
2. To enable participants to explain what Paul means when he uses the words: *sin, law, and flesh*.
3. To relate Paul's statement: "***I can will what I want but I cannot do it***" to our personal struggles to live in the freedom of Christ in today's world.

**Facilitator's Introductory Comments on Romans 7:7-25:** This is one of the most **hotly** debated portions of Paul's entire letter. To be properly understood it must be read in its proper context.

1. Some people read it as a description of Paul's personal experience before his call (*conversion*). This type of reasoning runs that no matter how hard Paul tried to keep the law, he always failed. Each failure magnified his sense of guilt driving him increasingly into depression. Finally, when he was totally overcome by his failure, he was confronted by Christ and his repressed guilt erupted in a desperate cry, "***Who will deliver me from this body of death.***" (7:24); and, then forgiven, restored and saved he exclaimed, "***Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!***" (7:25). But, we must be careful and not jump to the conclusion that this was Paul's real mindset. Nowhere does he suggest that he was under any personal burden of guilt from his inability to keep the law. On the contrary, he says he was "***as to righteousness under the law, blameless***" (Philippians 3:6).

2. Some interpreters read this section as if it describes a contrast between Paul's previous Jewish and more recent Christian experiences. In spite of the fact that Paul's experience with Christ was the lens through which he viewed everything, it is also doubtful that he would have drawn such a contrast.

3. We are going to try to read this section of Romans as if it applies to all people at every stage of their religious experience. Even those people who are religious; yes, even those who might be labelled '*very pious,*' continually face the struggle with sin that attempts to pervert God's good gifts. 'Religious' persons are no strangers to manifold desires. Even though they know the power of righteousness, they also know the power of sin. "*We,*" as Paul says, struggle; but, we do not struggle alone.

Paul's understanding of the law is very complex, as we are about to discover in this study session!

## TODAY'S SCRIPTURE TEXT: ROMANS 7:7-25

(In a separate addenda, participants will find three [3] different biblical translations of this passage. Which translation do you like best?)

## A) LAW –

- 1) What do we mean when we speak of the “**law**” in contemporary terms?
  - a) Police
  - b) Courts
  - c) Getting arrested
  - d) Legal statutes duly approved
  
- 2) Do some of these statements in Romans 7 seem to contradict each other? Can you explain them?

[Example: Vs. 12 – “**holy and good**” versus Vs. 11 – “**kills**”]

- 3) **Paul** was frequently attacked for his views on “**the Law.**” It may prove helpful for us to ascertain what he did mean when he spoke about it, by specifically looking at the following verses which mention the “**law**” in Romans 7:
  - a) Vs. 7 – **makes us know sin**
  - b) Vss. 7-8 – **produces covetousness**
  - c) Vss. 9-10 – **promises life but proves death to me**
  - d) Vs. 11 – **gives sin an opportunity; kills**
  - e) Vs. 12 – **is holy, just, good**
  - f) Vs. 13 – **is good but makes us know sin**
  - g) Vs. 14 – **is spiritual**
  
- 4) The purpose of the Law from an Old Testament perspective was twofold:
  - a) To manifest the Glory of God
  - b) To provide for the good of Israel
  
- 5) From a New Testament perspective it can be seen as three-fold:
  - a) To reveal sin
  - b) To drive sinful man to Christ
  - c) To foreshadow Christ

6) It is the misuse of the law, not the law itself, which is at the root of the problem. To quote Dr. Calvin Roetzel [RESOURCE BOOK – pg. 52] “*The question arose: “Is the law sin?” Paul answers: No, “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, just and good.” (7:12); the law is spiritual (7:10). It was not this good thing that brought death to me, but ‘Mr. Sin.’ The problem is not in the law or in the evil intentions of the Giver of the law; the flaw is in the human heart, that is, in its willingness to entertain Satan’s argument. So, the great inner battle is about the difference between what we ought to do and what we end up doing. As Paul put it, “I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (7:15, 19). It was not the law that brought death but Sin twisting the holy, just, good law to its own ends (7:11-12), and a crooked heart that believed Sin’s argument.*”

7) Seen from an even broader societal perspective it is not that the Law is evil, rather it is sin that is evil. The U S Congress may enact some bad laws, but not God! The Law is 'holy and righteous and good'; we're the ones who pervert it and thereby ruin our walk with Christ. We can't please God by serving the Law because we are sinners by nature and choice. We desperately need divine intervention (Christ)!

#### 8) The Use of the Law according to traditional Lutheran standards:

a) The **Book of Concord** {1580} officially distinguishes three uses, or purposes, of the Law in Article VI. It states: "*The Law was given to men for three reasons ...*"

- i. that "thereby outward discipline might be maintained against wild, disobedient men [*and that wild and intractable men might be restrained, as though by certain bars*]"
- ii. that "men thereby may be led to the knowledge of their sins"
- iii. that "after they are regenerate ... they might ... have a fixed rule according to which they are to regulate and direct their whole life"

b) The primary concern was to maintain that the Law should continue to be used by Christians after they had been regenerated by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel to counter the doctrine taught that the Law was no longer needed by regenerate Christians. The three *uses* of the Law are:

- i. **Curb** - Through fear of punishment, the Law keeps the sinful nature of both Christians and non-Christians under check. This does not stop sin, since the sin is already committed when the heart desires to do what is wrong, yet it does stop the open outbreak of sin that will do even further damage.
- ii. **Mirror** - The Law serves as a perfect reflection of what God created the human heart and life to be. It shows anyone who compares his/her life to God's requirement for perfection that he/she is sinful.
- iii. **Guide** - This use of the law that applies only to Christians. The law becomes the believer's helper. Empowered by the gospel truth of forgiveness and righteousness in Christ, the believer's new self eagerly desires to live to please the Triune God.

#### B) PAUL'S USE OF "I"

- 1) Romans 7:9 – is the first time in Romans that Paul uses the emphatic "I" {ego}. The apostle abruptly uses the present tense to vividly portray his former struggle in using the Law for sanctification. That shift, in Greek, from past tense to present tense signals a shift from narrative to a description of condition. Paul seems to be referring to his own experience as that which is typical of every person. The personal pronouns "I," "my," or "me" appear in the context of 7:7-25 over 40 times suggesting an intensely personal struggle.
- 2) The "I" story is every person's story – From other letters, we know that Paul uses "I" language to speak not just of his own experience, but the experience of all humanity. Consider the following:
  - i. Romans 7:9-11 – Paul, himself, before he became a follower of Christ

- ii. Romans 7:15-17 – Paul engaged in present struggles – the “new” Paul yearns to obey God; the “old” Paul rebels against God
- iii. Romans 7:19-23 – The sinfulness of sin results in a kind of “*spiritual schizophrenia*.”
- iv. Romans 7:23 – the term “waging war” (Gk: “ANTISTRATEUPMAI”) is only used here in the N.T.; It is a military term indicative of the severity of the battle between the law of God and the law of sin.
- v. Romans 7:24-25 – a reference to Adam or Eve? Paul is in utter anguish having reached the point of both self-disgust and self-despair. [C.S.Lewis has aptly written: “*No man knows how bad he is until he has tried to be good.*”] That is why God has to break us, before he can remake us! Paul cannot overcome sin by his own strength through the Law; he needs a supernatural power.
- vi. It is the struggle waged by any Christian.
- vii. Notice that the Holy Spirit is never mentioned in 7:14-25; this is an important “key.” Paul is whetting our appetites for Romans 8, wherein the Holy Spirit is mentioned over 20 times!

**C) DEFINING “FLESH”** - The Greek word **SARX** appears 22x in The Letter to the Romans, more than in any other book in the N.T. It is literally translated “**flesh**” in English. However, there are several descriptors that provide a more comprehensive and better definition:

- 1) flesh (*the soft substance of the living body, which covers the bones and is permeated with blood*) of both man and beasts
- 2) the body
- 3) the body of a man
  - used of natural or physical origin, generation or relationship
  - born of natural generation
- 4) the sensuous nature of man, "*the animal nature*"
  - without any suggestion of depravity
  - the animal nature with cravings which incite to sin
- 5) the physical nature of man as subject to suffering
- 6) a living creature (*because possessed of a body of flesh*) whether man or beast
- 7) in present context: the flesh, denotes mere human nature, the earthly nature of man apart from divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God

NOTE: Dr. Roetzel [RESOURCE BOOK] writes informatively about Paul's use of the term *flesh*, both in a neutral sense, and in the negative sense of being enslaved by sin, in the last 2 paragraphs under the heading of "Two Problems," (pp. 53-54). Suggest that you read this section!

### CONCLUDING SUMMARY THOUGHTS ON ROMANS 7:

*The key words: "LAW" "I".*

*The key question: How can I live a holy life?*

*The startling answer: I can't! (v.15,v.18).*

There are two great lessons that every person needs to learn. The first lesson pertains to salvation; the second lesson pertains to living the Christian life:

Lesson #1 -- I CANNOT SAVE MYSELF (*I need a Deliverer, One who can save me*). See Titus 3:5; Ephesians 2:8-9; Jeremiah 13:23; etc.

- I must come to that point in my life when I recognize that I am a sinner and that I am hopeless and helpless (*Rom. 5:6 "without strength"*). The Lord must do it all. I need to stop trying and start trusting. I must do the believing; God must do the saving.

Lesson #2 -- I CANNOT LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (*I need a Deliverer, One who can save me from the Power of indwelling sin*).

### QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO PONDER NOW OR LATER:

1. How has the Old Testament Law helped you to recognize your own sin (Romans 7:7-8)? In what way(s) have you struggled with the sin of coveting? Why is this particular sin so inescapable? How does the sin of coveting summarize the Ten Commandments?
2. As a Christian, how have you struggled with legalism or a desire to obey the Law (Romans 7:9-11)? When has this been most apparent in your Christian life? How can you explain Paul's schizophrenic view of the Law (Romans 7:12-13)? How can you balance the positive and negative aspects of the Law?
3. Do you relate at all to Paul's battle in Romans 7:14-25? Do you continue to experience similar behavior in relationship to the Old Testament Law or to rules in general? Why has this been such a battle? What has been the outcome of your personal walk with Christ? How can you focus more on living by Grace?
4. How are Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 5:16-25 similar? (*See Galatians text printed immediately below*) How are they different? What do both texts teach us about living the Christian life?

## Galatians 5:16-25 (NRSV)

### The Works of the Flesh

<sup>16</sup> Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envy, <sup>[a]</sup> drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

### The Fruit of the Spirit

<sup>22</sup> By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

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