

**TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
IHOP BIBLE STUDY**

21-- Romans 12: 9 - 21, "Practicing love" -- with commentary

The purpose of the Letter to the Romans is to develop a "Model for Living the Awakened/Transformed Life." Today's study is the 21st of 27 lessons.

According to our Study Chart we are studying the 4th section of "Become The Work of The Church." Our previous sessions cover Paul presentations on God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. This new section covers the Work of the Church. This is one of seven sessions under the rubric of "Ethics." This is the **second** session in this series. Remember, the focus of the Book of Romans is to provide us "The Model For Living The Awakened/Transformed Life."

BACKGROUND: Now, our work shifts to applying what we've learned in order to **become the work of The Church**. Observe, this is more than just doing the work of The Church. Paul wants us to embody The Church, to embrace it and morph ourselves in the shape of "little Christs;" you'll remember this is Luther's expression for Christians who live their lives fulfilling their intended purpose of being humane people and communities.

The way this work gets done becomes Christian Ethics; the way we treat others, and the way in which we view ourselves. It may be helpful to remember the short hand offered by Gut Trip Analysis. Christian Ethics always is WWJD?

Read the assigned material at one time.

REMEMBER! THE CONTEXT IS CHRISTIAN ETHICS.

NOTE: The IHOPers started with question # 6, then # 8, # 2 and finally # 14. This order is repeated if you are teaching the Bible Study to others. Starting off by asking the definition of "serving the Lord" set the stage for defining "Christian Hospitality, the definition of "Evil" and finally a political discussion of how to "overcome evil with good."

During the middle of our extensive conversation, we stopped to reflect on the fact that what we were doing was BEING THE CHURCH! While the Church is what the church does, it is the transformation of the doer that is important. We embody and embrace what we are.

1. Vs. 9a, What is your experience of sincere love? Is love ever insincere?

WS: One IHOPer reported that appliance salesmen can express insincere love. Other thoughts were: doing nice things for the wrong reasons (to be cynical); sometimes sexual love is performed for only selfish gratification.

2. Vs. 9b, Define the experience of "evil." (Keep it Gut Trip, remember.) Then, answer the question, can Christians ever "hate?"

WS: Considerable conversation was directed to this topic. Gut Trip Analysis defines evil as the Big Lie. It is the experience of evil to believe we are victims to our circumstances. It denies our freedom to choose.

The danger we face in believing otherwise is to make evil an **object** instead of a relationship. When this happens, evil becomes supernatural and ends in hopelessness. How can we fight it? 2) The second danger is believe that The Way Life Is does not encompass the horrific; i.e., the events of 9/11, or Nazi Germany.

The Axiom, "If it can happen, it will" can be applied. People are capable of bestiality, and this is not evil, it is a horrible expression of TWLI.

It is important that we do not give more credit to evil (and the demon or Satan) than they are due.

3. Vs. 9c, What is the experience of the "good" to which we cling?

WS: This is very important too. The "Good" does not belong to us, we belong to the Good. Jesus tells us that only God is good. Again, the "Good" is not an object but a relationship in which we join. When we experience At-One-Ment, we experience The Good.

4. Vs. 10a, If I was walking down the street and saw people being devoted to one another in brotherly love, what would I be seeing them do?

WS: We would see the burdens of our neighbors being relieved. My experience of living in a Christian community for eleven years illustrates the principle of holding all things in common. This is brotherly love in action.

5. Vs. 10b, How can we honor our selves while putting others above us?

WS: We honor ourselves when we intentionally do not take credit for things. Teilhard De Chardin uses this axiom, "We can get a lot accomplished when we do not care who gets the credit."

6. Vs. 11, What does "serving the Lord," look like?

WS: This is where the IHOPers began their discussion. The consensus of the group is that "serving the Lord" looks like doing a quality job. When teachers, the police, government officials, preachers, business people do quality work, then this is "serving the Lord." It doesn't matter if they are Christians or not. Our actions reveal this relationship whether or not we name it Christian.

7. Vs. 12, Identify your experience of a) being joyful in hope, b) patient in affliction, c) faithful in prayer. (Watch out! Be certain you are doing Gut Trip Analysis)

WS: HOPE—Paul reminds us in Romans 5:2 that hope is only hope when it is discovered in hopelessness. If the situation is not hopeless, what is the need for hope? Again, Paul reminds us in Romans 8:24 that our hope is in God who is experienced as Perfect At-One-Ment. In other words, our hope is found only outside of ourselves in this relationship.

FAITHFUL—Faithfulness is an expression of surrender to God.

PRAYER—Prayer is to have a plan, and a method to put the plan into action.

8. Vs. 13, What does Christian hospitality look like? It is any different from Agnostic hospitality? or Moslem hospitality?

WS: The IHOPers consensus was that Christian hospitality is hospitality put into action. It doesn't matter what label is put on it. Or, if we wish to put a Christian label on it, this is OK too.

9. Vs. 14, Define the difference between “blessing and not cursing those who persecute you.” Is this something Christians can afford to do?

WS: Such acts are what qualifies actions as being Christian or not.

WS: **Blessing those who persecute you** is the act of awakening and forgiving.

If this is not done, then we can not claim the title of Christian.

My personal experience is at one of my church appointments I was accused of stealing postage to support a city-wide 4th of July campaign. Always, I've believed my ministry extended to community leadership, and this was one way for the church budget to support the community. My accuser, a control freak, was one who ran off the previous three pastors in a similar fashion. After a confrontation with the accuser I agreed to have the Lion's Club pay back to the church more than the amount of the postage. **The confrontation is an act of awakening.**

Was this blessing this person? My confrontation with the individual was a blessing because it was an attempt to clear the air. However, my appeal to the Lion's Club is just good old passive aggression. The church funds should never have been paid back. I did not want to let this person have the last word. **My passive aggression is not an act of forgiveness. In fact, it can be said to be a method of “cursing.”**

Since this time, there have been acts of friendship. However, I would not call these actions reconciliation. Such is my life.

10. Vs. 16, What would “living in harmony” look like? In particular, what would our associating with people of “low position,” look like? How might our association with people of “high position” have influence to help those in a “low position?” What is our primary responsibility?

WS: **Concerning our association with people of a “low position.”** The IHOPers agreed that members of the church who see the custodian as their servant and not their colleague are not living in harmony.

The IHOPers got into a protracted conversation concerning the morality and values of those in business and government that mistreat the poor. While not everybody agreed, at the time we were demonstrating an open conversation during which a variety of opinions could be expressed. At this time, the IHOPers were embodying The Church.

11. Vs. 17, How can we “Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody?”

WS: Can we be everything to everybody? My answer is No! But we can be to our neighbor what our neighbor needs from us at the time. For instance, if our enjoy a drink or a glass of wine for supper, yet when our neighbor who is an AA member comes to visit or eat with us we can forgo this simple pleasure in order to respect the needs of our neighbor.

12. Vs. 18, What can we do to guarantee that we live “at peace with everybody?”

WS: It is necessary that Christian work for those things that bring about At-One-Ment in all of our relationships.

Does this mean that there is no confrontation? Not at all. Christians are those who use confrontation in order to awaken those who live in ways that result in separation. We have a duty to stand in the gap and call others to accountability.

13. Vs. 19, Define "God's wrath."

WS: Unmerited love and forgiveness is God's wrath when applied in situations of accountability.

14. Vs. 21, What are some ways we can not be "overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good?" If I was walking down the street and I saw evil, what would I be seeing? What would I experience?

WS: The basic formula for ethical decisions is **WWJD**.

Again, the IHOPers had a protracted conversation concerning the political aspects of this question. My summary is that people get upset when money is "thrown" at the poor because a few (or many) of them misuse it. But where is our anger at the top of the food chain whose salaries range from 400% to 1,000% of the lowest paid worker in their organization?

How do we overcome "this evil" with good?

Some of the IHOPers expressed that the way to do good was to become involved in the political process of changing those administrations that do not honor the poor and the widows. The ethics of Jesus Christ are very clear that Christian's primary focus is on the poor as well as those who are poor in spirit. (See: Matthew 25: 31 - 46, Luke 4: 16 - 19, and especially, Isaiah 3: 13 - 15 and 10: 1 - 4.

Go ahead and read these references. Do not put it off. The message is terrifically illuminating.

Alright folks, talk to me!