

**TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
IHOP BIBLE STUDY**

24-- Romans 14: 1 – 23, “The Weak and the Strong.” -- 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 24th 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 **fifth** 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.

REMEMBER! THE CONTEXT IS CHRISTIAN ETHICS.

ABOUT THIS LESSON: In this lesson we are reviewing the heart of Christian Ethics. In the Romans chart there are four lessons in the section, “The Rule of Love: Christian Ethics.”

In this lesson, Paul sets forth the ethical stance of what it means to be humane as well as human. In **vs. 7 – 9**, Paul provides the context of “belonging to the Lord.” Be certain to grasp his main idea. “The Lord” is our context for living in peace with our neighbor and ourselves.

It is out of this context that Paul reminds us about the dangers of passing judgment on the actions of others. His appeal is not to put stumbling blocks or obstacles in the way of our neighbors. In fact, he tells us the Christian ethic is to be whatever our neighbor needs us to be, because our do all things through Christ. The reward for taking this stance is that we live in a deep sense of satisfaction (blessedness).

Define and then ground in your own human experience the following before reading the assignment:

1) Weak faith (Yes, it is the opposite of “strong” faith. So, what is faith?)

WS: The experience of faith is trust. The youth game of blindfolding one person who stands in a circle of people with arms folded. On the count of three the blindfolded person falls backward “trusting” they will be caught. In this way, trust/faith is a form of surrender. Weak faith represents the unsundered life.

2) Passing judgment

WS: A judgment always is a wake-up call. When the highway patrol gives us a ticket we have just be awakened to the fact we have broken a law.

3) God’s judgment

WS: God's judgment always is a wake-up call to our intended purpose of living humane lives in At-One-Ment with neighbor, self and finally with God that is experienced as Perfect At-One-Ment; in this way we fulfill the Great Commandment.

4) Righteousness

WS: Living in a right relationship with neighbor, self and God. Righteousness is a form of At-One-Ment.

5) Living to the Lord: (Hint: The Lord always is associated with the sacrifice of the Cross. If we "live to the Lord," what does this mean?)

WS: The Cross and Resurrection are events that characterize The Lord; they are our context for life and living. **Our experience of The Cross** is the burdens we bear or the pains we inflict on ourselves, spouses and neighbors. **Our experience of The Resurrection** is in living the Good News we are not victims of our circumstances, rather we are victors living in the midst of our circumstances. We are in charge of our attitude. We are in charge of the relationship we choose to make to the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Read the assigned reading at one time.

I. Begin at Vss. 7 – 9, What does it mean to "live to the Lord?"

A. Vs. 7, How do we not live, or die, to ourselves alone?

WS: To "live to the Lord" is to live to our intended purpose of living humane lives. A recent article in the *Realistic Living* (a newsletter -- Nov. 2005) Gene Marshall observes, "In other words, being fully our Spirit self entails being dead to the self, to ego, to personality. Here is the Apostle Paul's repeated statement, 'We were crucified with Christ that we might also be raised up with him in newness of life.' What is killed here? It is the illusion that the personality is the real me. It is slavery to the compulsion of grinding out this set of habits as my only possible life. Redemption means death to the compulsion—death to this illusion—death to life in this box [of the self]." For me, this is the best definition I have ever read or wrote myself! What do you think?

B. Vs. 9, How is the sacrifice of Christ for both the living and the dead?

WS: The "Living" are those who are awake to living the humane life. The "Dead" are the unawakened. The sacrifice of Christ provides the context for the living of all live.

C. Vs. 8, What is the experience of living to the Lord that makes living or dieing irrelevant?

WS: Living to the Lord is to live in touch with eternity itself. We already are dead people. While our physical bodies may return to dust, our Christ personalities never change. Also, this is one of the consequences of our baptism; as we go under the water of baptism we die to the things of this world. As we are lifted up we arise with Christ as new creatures.

D. What are the implications for living ethically?

WS: To live ethically is to live through Christ - WWJD. Christians never have an immediate relationship to anything or anyone, not even with our spouses! We only have secondary relationships; everything we do, say, or want, is in the context of living through Christ: "WWJD."

II. Vss. 1 – 6, Describe the two examples Paul uses of the persons with weak faith.

WS: The two examples are EATING Meat eaters and THE SACRED DAY. One day more sacred God loves both Vegans God accepts both All days the same

A. **Vs. 3B,** What does it mean "for God has accepted him (or her)?"

WS: All creation finds its reality in God who is experienced as Perfect At-One-Ment. The IHOPers explored this topic at length. The example was Fred Phelps, a Topeka pastor with a national reputation for demonstrating as the funerals of gays, and more recently at the funerals of soldiers who died in Iraq. The question is, how does God accept Fred Phelps?

My answer is that Fred Phelps is a child of God who lives the antithesis of what it means to be a humane being that lives in At-One-Ment with neighbor, self and God.

III. Vss. 10 – 12, What is God's judgment seat and what is the experience of giving "an account of himself (or herself) to God?"

WS: God's judgment always is to awaken us to living the humane life. When we do not live in this way, then we get a wake-up call; "the reward for the deed is found in the deed itself." Humans experience wake-up calls as judgment, when in reality it is an expression of how much God loves us.

IV. Vss. 13 – 22A, Lift up the significance of Paul's argument here.

WS: For humans to pass judgment on the actions of others actually produces the opposite of our intended effect; we become an obstacle that prevents others from awakening. Our first concern is not the actions of our neighbors; rather it is the effects of our actions on others.

A. **Vs. 16,** "Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil."

WS: This verse perplexed me because it comes among those verses in which those who are the awakened as to regulate their lives so as not to become stumbling blocks. My question becomes, if what I know to be good makes someone else stumble, then how am I to defend my knowledge of what is the good?

The IHOPers chewed on this question for while. Fred Phelps, the Topeka Lone Arranger came back to mind. Pastor Bob Winters observed there are 7 stages of emotional growth. Each stage has characteristics to be resolved before passing on to the next, such as legalism becomes compulsive, fixated and judgmental. Winters is of the opinion that Phelps never resolved this stage, he is stuck.

Regarding the question, I suppose it is being suggested that the activities of Rev. Phelps represents the antithesis of At-One-Ment. Hence, criticism of his activities represents the good. Paul's ethical point is that when criticism represents the good, we can not let others regard it as evil.

However, this still represents speculation.

Matthew Henry's Commentary observes the following: "As we value the reputation of the good we profess and practice, let us seek that it may not be evil-spoken of. "

B. **Vs. 18**, What is the experience of being "pleasing to God and approved by men (or women)?"

WS: The definition of being "pleasing to God" is to live in At-One-Ment or it is to live the humane life. My experience of being "pleasing to God" is on those occasions when my wife tells me, "Bill, today you've been fun to be around, and I love you." This makes me smile, and God smiles too.

C. **Vs. 21**, In light of Christian ethics, why are we charged with the responsibility of not making our neighbor stumble?

WS: In living to the Lord means to all of creation fulfills its intended purpose by living the human life of At-One-Ment with neighbor, self and God. When our neighbor is prevented from awaking to this Good News, then the whole of humanity (or human-ness) has a crack in it, or a part that is broken away from the wholeness in which we are intended to live. Consequently, those who are awakened are charged with the responsibility of living so that our neighbors are not prevented from awakening.

IV. **Vss. 22 - 23**, Why is it important that we keep things "between yourself and God?"

WS: This is done to keep our priorities straight. In this way we fulfill our intended purpose of living the humane life.

A. **Vs. 22B**, What is the experience of a person who is "blessed?"

WS: The term "blessed" means to be deeply happy.

Alright folks, talk to me.

NOTE: There will be no Bible Study lessons on February 21 and 28. February 14th is the concluding Lesson # 27 in Romans. I'll be on a Florida vacation, and working on the 1 Corinthians chart and lesson plans.

This is the first break the IHOP Bible Study has taken in four and a half years.

We'll be back to work together on March 7th, 2006. You'll receive the study page prior to our meeting time. Pastor Bill