

# BIBLE & BAGEL

## Romans – Our Common Faith

9 March 2016

When people outside speak of the church today we often hear things like “the church is full of hypocrites”, this is not a 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century problem. It has existed since the early days of the church. Apostle Paul in the beginning of chapter 12 exhorts us not to think like the world anymore, but rather to think as God does. So how is godly thinking supposed to manifest in “real time”. Read on ...

### *Romans 12:3-8*

*For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. 4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. 6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. NKJV*

Let us keep in the forefront of our minds that Apostle Paul was speaking to various groups of people in the church which met in the home of a Jewish person. There were Jewish believers (Messianic), Jewish pre-believers, Non-Jewish believers and pre-believers and the curious non-Jews. Of course his words were addressed primarily to those who were of faith and the Jewish pre-believers.

He had already told them to change their way of thinking, not to think according to the standards of the people around them but to have their minds changed to think in God's ways according to the Word of God (Torah). In the world's way everything was “me-centred”, life was all about satisfying the individual's needs and desires. Apostle Paul gives them a new way to think; not to think too highly of themselves i.e. not to be proud but to know who they are in Christ and to live for the good of the whole community and to use our talents for the benefit of all.

Our natural human instinct is to think of ourselves first, to take care of ourselves. Even in the work place people are often clamouring for promotion and recognition by the boss. This often leads to office politics and much unhappiness in the workplace ending up with people resigning and new people coming in. What if everyone was simply working for the good of the whole company? Or what if everyone in the church was working for the good of all the members of the church and not for recognition from the pastors or elders? It is self-centredness and pride that leads to conflicts. The Bible here exhorts us to live for others, to use the gifts and talents that we have for the good of the community and not worry about our own position or being noticed. Apostle Peter tells us to humble ourselves before God and He will raise us up<sup>i</sup>, the book of Psalms also tells us that promotion is from God<sup>ii</sup>. Our role is to live in humility and work for the community and trust God for whatever promotion He sees fit for us.

### *Romans 12:9-21*

*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. 10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one*



*another; 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; 13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. 17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,"\* says the Lord. 20 Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."\* 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. NKJV*

Living in God's kingdom is diametrically opposite to that of the world. In God's community people of different backgrounds are commanded to love each other, in some translations it says "be devoted" to one another. We are to be friends with people whom we consider of a different social standing than ourselves. We are told not to take revenge when we are offended or hurt, to love those who persecute us instead we are to do good and bless those who hurt us. We are not to allow the evil that others may do to us to control our emotions but rather to act in the opposite spirit when it happens.

This is how a person with a transformed mind is supposed to act; loving others, associating with people who have a different especially lower social standing, not taking revenge but leaving space for God to handle situations and doing good to those who hurt us. Paul mentions all these because of the differences between the groups in the Roman church. We need to take a good look at ourselves and compare how we act to the way Apostle Paul says we should act here. Do we line up with the Word of God here or are there still traces of the world in the way we live and act especially among the church community. With regards to persecution we need to ask ourselves how we react when people make fun of us and ridicule us because of our faith. What is our response to such people? It also applies when we have a disagreement with others, do we get angry and refuse to talk them anymore or can we respond to them in love and do good and bless them. With regard to the Apostle Paul's reference to heaping burning coals on their heads taken from Proverbs 25:21-22, my understanding is that it simply means that by doing good to someone who abuses us we will cause them to think about why we respond this way in spite of what they have done to us and perhaps they will realize it is because we are believers in Jesus. The promise in Proverbs is that when we do that God will reward us. It is when we live this way that people will see that our faith is genuine and we are not one of those "hypocrites" that the church is supposed to be full of.

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<sup>i</sup> 1 Peter 5:6

<sup>ii</sup> Pslam 75:6

