

Romans Part 42 – Chapter 12

Sunday, February 26, 2023

With input from Roland Muller https://nabataea.net/explore/culture_and_religion/honorshame,

Review: Last week we focused on Romans 12:10:

“Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”

Since Paul will be focusing on how Christians operate within the confines of culture and government authority, we find this verse to have universal application to any culture or location where we might be living. Paul himself was a Roman Jew who understood two unique cultures. The Jewish culture which would highly value family and tradition and Judaism itself, which is not a faith-based religion, but an “orthoprax and ethnoreligion” – meaning pertaining to deed, practice, and identity or ethnicity.”

Paul knows Roman culture values wealth and education. Its religious culture would be polytheistic and mostly accepting of other religions. It was a highly aristocratic society where status and education were highly valued – not family and tradition.

Paul introduces the two ideas of love and honor which transcend the cultures. This should force us to recognize the cultural norms we embrace and use scripture as a filter to identify inconsistencies, rather than force our religion through the filter of our culture. Another way of saying this would be: we should have a biblical worldview over a cultural/humanistic worldview.

We then examined Christian Sociologist, Robert Muller’s three social building blocks of each culture as a combination of fear, shame and guilt.

Roland Muller: While individual cultures may react to sin in different way, in general terms there are great blocks of the world that have similar worldviews.

Where are the major blocks? Many western nations (Northern Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand) have cultures that contain mostly guilt-based cultural characteristics. On the other hand, much of the Middle East and Asia is made up shame-based cultures. Most of the primal religions and cultures of the world (such as tribes in the jungles of Africa, Asia, and South America) are structured around fear-based principles.

One of these basic foundations is their belief in right versus wrong. This understanding is so deeply ingrained in western culture, that westerners analyze almost everything from this perspective. Most western forms of entertainment are built upon ‘the good guys and the bad guys.’ It is so familiar to westerners that few of them question its validity. It is such an integral part of religion and society, that they often cannot imagine a world where ‘right versus wrong’ isn’t the accepted basic underlying principle.

‘Right versus wrong’ is the yardstick used in their culture to measure everything else with. They talk about the rightness and wrongness of someone else’s actions. They talk about things being “right for me.” They are obsessed with knowing their rights and exercising them. Many western societies spend countless hours and billions of dollars debating the wrongs of society. Is homosexuality right or wrong? Is spending billions on the military right or wrong? Is possession of drugs right or wrong? How about possession of nuclear bombs, or weapons of mass destruction?

Evangelical Christians in particular, often live in circles that are governed by guilt principles based on the authority of the Bible. Outside of these circles, guilt is defined in many other ways. It can be a sense of public disapproval, being in trouble with the authorities, or not being politically correct. However guilt is defined, and to what extent it influences a culture varies widely from location to location. However, the understanding of right and wrong has been instrumental in forming much of western society.

“I’m OK, you’re OK” is an important philosophy in western culture. In order not to point a finger at people, western society continues to expand the limits of what is acceptable activity. By making homosexuality acceptable, they help thousands of people avoid feeling guilty. This could also be termed as a “social construct.”

This alone is enough to convince many people in western society that it’s OK for people to be homosexual. In fact, almost anything is tolerated as long as it doesn’t hurt another person. With abortion, you declare that the unborn child is not a person yet, therefore its mother is not hurting another person. This can get bizarre when an expectant mother is hit by a drunk driver, lives, but the baby dies, and the drunk driver can be convicted of murder. Situational ethics or morals take hold when foundational biblical principles are discarded.

The Roman Connection

Roman law introduced the concept that the law was above everyone, even the lawmakers. This idea was not totally new. The Jews under Moses understood this. Greek politicians developed a similar plan with their city-state, but with laws that were man made, not divine. The Romans, however, perfected the system, and put it into widespread use. They developed a type of democracy known as the republic. They put in place a complex legal system that requires the existence and function of lawmakers, lawyers, and judges.

Roman law during the Roman Empire assumed that the individual’s rights were granted by the state (by government) and that lawmakers can make up laws. Under Roman law, the state was supreme, and rights were granted or erased whenever lawmakers decided. A basic premise is that there is no law higher than the government’s law.

The known world was “unified” and controlled by one large government. This unification was symbolized in Roman times by something known as the fasces - a bundle of wooden rods bound together by red-colored bands. In ancient Rome the fasces was fixed to a wooden pole, with an ax at the top or side. This symbolized the unification of the people under a single government. The ax suggested what would happen to anyone who didn’t obey the government. The Roman fasces became the origin of the word fascism.



We then recognized in the Lincoln Memorial that Lincolns arms rest on fasces (FAS-eez).

Adding to the American-ness, there are thirteen rods shown in the fasces, suggesting the thirteen original states that achieved independence from Britain and formed the United States. Seen as symbols of the states — and the American motto "E Pluribus Unum," or "Out of Many, One," — the rods bound together suggest the union of the states and their bond by the Constitution. Each state is weaker individually, but together, they are stronger. This was to represent that we are a republic - A state in which supreme power is held by the people and their elected representatives, and which has an elected or nominated president rather than a monarch – Oxford

From a Socialist's viewpoint, they define the fasces as an obvious reference that the United States has always been a form of Fascism, and now state that Nationalism is a threat to Globalism.

Fascism is a political philosophy, movement, or regime that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition. – Merriam-Webster

Since Socialism itself advocates class warfare in order to achieve its means, this claim should be seen as a leap of logic or incongruous way to view right and wrong, in the same way a pregnant mother's baby has rights, but only if the mother sees it that way.

What is Communism?

A political theory derived from Karl Marx, advocating class war and leading to a society in which all property is publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to their abilities and needs – Oxford

Communism is a political and economic ideology that positions itself in opposition to liberal democracy and capitalism, advocating instead for a classless system in which the means of production are owned communally and private property is nonexistent or severely curtailed – Investopedia

Tertullian, the early church father who first developed a code of systematic theology, was a lawyer steeped in Roman law. Using his understanding of law, and the need for justice, guilt, and redemption, he laid the basis for Christian systematic theology, as it would develop in the west.

Basil the Great was born in 329 AD, and after completing his education in Athens he went on to practice law and teach rhetoric. Next came Augustine who was born in 354 AD into the home of a Roman official in the North African town of Tagaste. He received his early education in the local school, where he learned Latin to the accompaniment of many beatings.

Today, it is interesting to notice that there are many non-western sources who link guilt-based culture with Christianity. In October 1999, Isaiah Kalinowski, wrote "... guilt culture is due largely to Christianity. A shame culture is one in which individuals are kept from transgressing the social order by fear of public disgrace. On the other hand, in a guilt culture, one's own moral attitudes and fear of retribution in the distant future are what enforce the ethical behavior of a member of that society."

From Kalinowski's perspective, guilt-based culture is linked to Christian theology. This is an unfortunate misrepresentation, as the Bible was written in a shame-based setting and speaks to all cultures and worldviews. On the other hand, Christians, must recognize the incredible impact that guilt-based culture has had on their history and understanding and interpretation of the Bible.

The Eastern Scene - Christianity in the east, however, developed differently. Eastern theologians did not use Roman law as a vehicle for interpreting the gospel. Rather, the eastern world was caught up in the shame-honor relationship that was prevalent in societies scattered from the Middle East to the Far East. Eastern Orthodox theology didn't deal directly with sin, guilt, and redemption.

In the same way, Islam, which rose to prominence around 600 AD, teaches that God remains over all, and that law is in his hands, not the hands of lawmakers.

The Qur'an enforces the principle that God is overall with the story about Pharaoh and how he was shown Allah's "mightiest miracle, but he denied it and rebelled." The Pharaoh quickly went away and summoning all his men, made to them a proclamation. 'I am your supreme Lord.' The Qur'an then tells us that Allah "Smote him," and goes on to warn, "Surely in this there is a lesson for the God fearing."

Therefore, it would be unthinkable to a Muslim, that a lawmaker could make a law that is over all. This is why Islam presents both a religious and a cultural pattern for people to live by. God dictates both moral laws and civil laws.

Fear-Based Cultures

As we drew near to the jungle village, the sound of drums could be heard. Drawing closer, we could see people dancing and withering on the ground. A man approached us and explained that they could not go further. The village was doing a sacred rite to improve the economy and bring more trade to the area. We were escorted away and not given a chance to introduce why we had come to their village. Later we heard that a human sacrifice had been offered to the spirits that day.

In another situation we arrived in a village when a rain-making ceremony was about to begin. They were invited to watch. A black bull was led to the edge of the village where it faced the direction from where the rain would come. The animal's throat was cut and it fell over on its left side, to the delight of all. This indicated that the sacrifice was acceptable. The men then cut up the meat and cooked it. As the meat was cooking, an old man began to shout out a prayer to the spirits for rain. Soon everyone joined in. After the meat was eaten, the shouting turned into dancing. The villagers danced all afternoon until the rain came. It rained so heavily that everyone had to run for shelter. Did the rituals bring the rain? To the natives it was obvious and there was no way that we rational westerners convince them otherwise.

As these two stories illustrate, there are many people in the world today whose lives revolve around their interaction with the spiritual world. They believe that gods and spirits exist in the universe and they must live in peace with these unseen powers, either by living quietly, or by appeasing these powers.

Based on their worldview, these cultures and peoples view the universe as a place filled with gods, demons, spirits, ghosts, and ancestors. Man needs to live at peace with the powers around him, and often man lives in fear. This fear is based on a number of different things. First, man fears man. Tribal

wars are endemic, with captives becoming slaves or, sometimes, a meal for cannibals. Whenever tribes encounter people from outside of their own group, they approached them with suspicion and fear.

The struggle that these people face is simply one of needing power. Using their voodoo, charms, and other methods, they seek to gain control over other people and over the controlling powers of the universe. The paradigm that these people live in is one of fear versus power.

At the end of the 19th century, E. B. Tylor attempted to understand the difference in thinking between Europeans and other peoples living in Africa and South America. In his writings he coined the word 'animism' from the Latin word anima for 'soul.' **Animism:** The belief that natural objects such as rivers and rocks possess a soul or spirit.

He saw the animistic worldview as interpreting everything from a spiritual philosophy rather than a materialistic philosophy. Many sociologists of Tylor's era saw mankind moving from an ancient worldview based on the supernatural to a modern worldview based on science and reality.

Dave Burnett states in his book *Unearthly Powers*, that H. W. Turner later advocated the use of the term primal religion, meaning that "these religions both anteceded the great historic religions and continue to reveal many of the basic or primary features of religion." Almost everywhere you find animists or primal religions you find people living under the influence of a fear-based culture.

Burnett goes on to state, "Power can be understood in many ways: physical, political, economic, social, and religious. The secular worldview tends to regard all power as originating from within the material world. ... In contrast, primal worldviews see such powers not only as being real within the empirical world but as having their primary origin outside the visible world."

In any form of these worldviews love is still a prominent and transcendent force. Paul faces animism and polytheism in Athens, Greece in Acts 17 and declares that he knows the "unknown God." *"People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.*

24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. 27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

29 "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."

Notice Paul honors the culture and the leaders, and offers to remove the fear of retaliation from “The Unknown God”

Notice the stark contrast of the message he has for the Jews who value law and family honor:

Romans 10:5-10: *Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: “The person who does these things will live by them.”⁶ But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).*

8 But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: ⁹ If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

Paul will tell us in **Romans 13:1-2:**

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

But the western worldview within a republic will give us the right to take up arms and rebel against tyranny....

What shall we do?

How many times do we want the church to be a democracy? We see this in church splits. Someone disagrees with a decision with leadership and instead of following biblical principles of Matthew 18, they gather the wagons, get everyone involved and overthrow the tyrants.

And yet, if we apply **Romans 12:10:**

“Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”

we take on our biblical responsibilities as children of God, set aside our rights, and obey God.