



SESSION 3: IS AMERICA GOD'S FAVORITE NATION?

READINGS:

- Amos 5:14–15, 9:11–15; Jonah; Ephesians 2:13–22; I Peter 2:1–10; Acts 2:1–13
- Janice Love, “Religion and Politics” section in “Multilateralism: Faithful Reflection on International Relations” (Appendix A)

We are told that we are not to resist evil but to turn the other cheek. The world assumes that evil must be resisted by every means available. We are told to love our enemies and bless those who curse us. The world assumes that friends are to be loved and enemies hated. We are told that the sun rises on the just and the unjust alike. The world considers this indiscriminating; it would like to see clouds over evil people and is offended when they go unpunished. We are told that outcasts and harlots enter the kingdom of God before many who are perfunctorily righteous. Again unfair, the world thinks; respectable people should head the procession. We are told that the gate to salvation is narrow. The world would prefer it to be broad. We are told to be as care-free as birds and flowers. The world counsels prudence. . . . The great Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev

said that a wind of freedom blows through these teachings that frightens the world and makes us want to deflect them by postponement—not yet, not yet! H.G. Wells was evidently right: Either there was something mad about this man, or our hearts are still too small for his message.

— Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*



The belief that one is carrying out divine purpose can serve legitimate needs and sustain opposition to injustice, but it can also promote dangerous simplifications — especially if the believer has virtually unlimited power. . . . At its best, providentialist thinking can offer a powerful antidote to self-righteousness.

— Jackson Lears,
“How a War Became a Crusade,”
The New York Times, March 3, 2005

Bible Study

Divide the group into three sections, assigning one of the three major passages to each: Romans 12, Matthew 5–7, and Luke 6:27–37. (If the group is large enough, divide into four groups and assign parts of Matthew 5–7 to them.)

† Romans 12

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought

to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly, do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.” No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

