



## The Book of Romans

#5

### Experiencing Romans 13, 14, 15, and 16

Dear Co-workers,

As Paul continues to share his insights into the personal responsibility of believers he proceeds to outline in Romans 13:1-7 the need for Christians to be good citizens. Without obedience, cooperation and participation in government there can be no law and order. The result is chaos. Yet in some countries, like Germany during World War II, some used Romans 13:1-7, to either remain silent or to be supportive of Hitler and his government. In America today good citizens are those who recognize that they have been entrusted with the responsibility to see that government leadership is done in a just and moral fashion, not violating God's commands of compassion. This is particularly true if we believe that the one in authority "is God's servant to do you good" (Romans 13:4).

Walter Wink in his article Jesus and Alinsky shows us how Jesus submitted Himself to the governing authorities as Paul states must be done in Romans 13:1, and at the same time to God's command to love and empower the weak. Wink begins his article by citing Jesus' teaching in Matt.5:38-41 to "not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to the other also; and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles."(Matt.5:38-41 Revised Standard Version) After quoting these verses, Wink goes on to explain, "The Powers That Be literally stand on their dignity. Nothing takes away their potency faster than deft lampooning. By refusing to be awed by their power, the powerless are emboldened to seize the initiative, even where structural change is not possible. This message, far from being a counsel of perfection, unattainable in this life, is a practical, strategic measure for empowering the oppressed."

"Why then does Jesus counsel those already humiliated people to turn the other cheek? Because this action robs the oppressor of power to humiliate them. The person then who turns the other cheek is saying in effect, 'Try again. Your first blow failed to achieve its intended effect. I deny you the power to humiliate me. I am a human being just like you!'"

"But why walk the second mile? Is it not to rebound to the opposite extreme: aiding and abetting the enemy? Not at all. The question here, as in the two previous instances, is how the oppressed can recover the initiative, how they

can assert their human dignity in a situation that cannot for that time being be changed.”

“The debtor in Jesus’ example turned the law against his creditor by obeying it, following the letter of the law, but throwing in his underwear as well. The creditor’s greed is exposed.”

Walter Wink goes on to report, “During World War II, when Nazi authorities in occupied Denmark promulgated an order that all Jews had to wear yellow armbands with the Star of David, the King made it a point to attend a celebration in the Copenhagen synagogue. He and most of the population of Copenhagen donned yellow armbands as well. His stand was affirmed by the Bishop of Sjaelland and other Lutheran clergy. The Nazis eventually had to rescind the order.”

“Disavowing violence, Jesus wades into the hostility of Jerusalem open-handed, setting simple truth against force. Terrified by the threat of this man and his following, the authorities resort to their ultimate deterrent, death, only to discover it impotent and themselves unmasked. The cross hideous and macabre, becomes the symbol of liberation. The movement that should have died becomes a world religion.”

Paul is not calling us to be docile people who are indifferent to the way government treats people. Paul, says, “The authorities that exist have been established by God.”(Romans 13:1) “This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants,”(Romans 13:6 NIV) If we are truly the salt and light that Christ has called us to be in Matt.5:13-16, then in obedience to these words of Jesus we will expose those who are not God’s servants and let His light shine through us to expose the corruption and oppression on the part of those authorities who are not living up to their high calling. Of course, all of this must be done in love, for Romans 13:8 says, “he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.” Paul goes on and declares, “whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”(Romans 13:9,10 NIV)

“But make sure that you don’t get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation

work He began when we first believed. We can't afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!" (Romans 13:11-14 The Message Bible) The hour is late-- we must seize the day making the most of it. We must share with the hurting, hopeless and homeless that there is hope, for Christ is Risen. The time has come to stand on the Word of God in love against those principalities and powers, which would destroy, the most vulnerable of God's children. We must "be up and awake to what God is doing! We can't afford to waste a minute." Each day many are going to a Christ-less eternity. Now we must let the Spirit lead us to share with them in word and deed the eternal life provided through our Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Life is a witness to God's love and power working in us and through us. Such a witness involves not only sharing our faith in words but also in direct actions. In Romans 14, Paul goes into great detail about respecting the opinions and beliefs of others. He declares, "accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters." (Romans 14:1 NIV) What are the disputable matters Paul refers to in this chapter?

"For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this reason, Christ died and returned to life so that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before Me; every tongue will confess to God!'" (Romans 14:7-12 NIV)

The realization that Jesus is Lord transforms the way we treat other people. No longer can we look down on others because they also are created in the image of God. To stand in judgement of them puts us immediately under the judgment seat of God. We are redeemed as a result of His grace and now we must extend that grace to others. "So let's agree to use all our energy in getting along with each other. Help others with encouraging words: don't drag them down by finding fault." (Romans 14:19 The Message Bible)

"We who are strong (in our convictions and of robust faith) ought to bear with the failings and the frailties and the tender scruples of the weak: (we ought to

help carry the doubts and qualms of others) and not to please ourselves. Let each one of us make it a practice to please (make happy) his neighbor for his good and for his true welfare, to edify him (to strengthen him and build him up spiritually.) For Christ did not please Himself (gave no thought to His own interests): but, as it is written. “The reproaches and abuses of those who reproached and abused you fell on me.”(Romans 15:1-3 The Amplified Bible)

So if we are bearing the frailties of others, not pleasing ourselves and living to please others, what hope do we really have? Paul answers by stating, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”(Romans 15:4 NIV) Yes, it is through endurance in spite of the circumstances and the encouragement of Scriptures that we find hope. “Now may the God Who gives the power of patient endurance (steadfastness) and Who supplies encouragement, grant you to live in such mutual harmony and such full sympathy with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus. That together you may (unanimously) with united hearts and one voice, praise, and glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (The Messiah) (Romans 15:6,7 The Amplified Bible). “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”(Romans 15:7NIV)

The formula for hope in the midst of hopelessness involves endurance as we find encouragement in the Scriptures, continuing to praise God in spite of the circumstances, and trusting in Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praise to Him, all you peoples.’ And again, Isaiah says, ‘The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in Him.’”(Romans 15:11,12 NIV) It is because of Jesus “The Root of Jesse” that both Jews and Gentiles now have hope. Paul now declares to each of us, “May the God of your hope so fill you with all joy and peace in believing (through the experience of your faith) that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound and be overflowing (bubbling over) with hope.”(Romans 15:13 The Amplified Bible) Now in the midst of the multitude of needs both for New Life Evangelistic Center and in my personal life I find myself praying, “Dear God of hope I am asking you now by faith to fill me with all joy and peace as I put my trust in You. Please send an extra measure of the Holy Spirit upon me in order that I may abound and be overflowing in hope. Help me Lord to ‘become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.’(Romans 15:16,17 NIV) Thank you Almighty God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.... by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit!”(Romans 15:18,19 NIV)

As you read the rest of Romans 15, what do you see is Paul's greatest ambition? What is your greatest ambition in life? Desiring to, above all proclaim the gospel (the good news Christ is Risen). Paul was able to declare, "I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. I urge you, brothers (this also includes you sisters) by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me."(Romans 15:29,30 NIV)

The last chapter of Romans, Romans 16 is one that many quickly skip over. That is why I appreciate the following paragraph that John R.W. Stott in his book The Message of Romans shares with us. "I think," wrote Chrysostom, "that many even of those who have the appearance of being extremely good men, hasten over this part of the epistle as superfluous .... Yet," he went on, "the gold founders people are careful even about the little fragments...it is possible even from bare names to find a great treasure." Brunner went further and called Romans 16 'one of the most instructive chapters of the New Testament', because it encourages personal relationships of love in the Church." In Romans 16:1-2 we see a commendation and in verses 3-16 many greetings. As you read these, what truths do you discover and what lessons do you learn about the personal relations of love in the early Church?

As Paul concludes this great Book of Romans he warns the readers, "Keep a sharp eye out for those who take bits and pieces of the teaching you learned and then use them to make trouble. Give those people a wide berth. They have no intention of living for our Master Christ. They're only in this for what they can get out of it, and aren't above using pious sweet talk to dupe unsuspecting innocents."(Romans 16:17,18 The Message Bible)

Along with this warning Paul also gives the encouragement of victory as he declares, "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."(Romans 16:20 NIV)

After greeting friends and associates Paul leaves us with this proclamation of hope and assurance. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah) be with you all. Amen (so be it). Now to Him Who is able to strengthen you in the faith which is in accordance with my Gospel and the preaching of (concerning) Jesus Christ (the Messiah), according to the revelation (the unveiling) of the mystery of the plan of redemption which was kept in silence and secret for long ages. But is now disclosed and through the prophetic Scriptures is made know to all nations, according to the command of the Eternal God, (to win them) to obedience to the

faith.”(Romans 16:24-26 The Amplified Bible) In these verses Paul refers to “my gospel”. Have you allowed this gospel of the good news of the resurrection of Jesus to become such an important part of your life that you can refer to it as my gospel? Are you allowing Jesus to transform your life into one that is filled “with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”?(Romans 15:13) In order to experience this miracle of joy, peace, power and hope each and everyday we must keep in mind Romans 13:14 where it says, “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” As we clothe ourselves in Jesus and the assurance of His abiding love (see Romans 8:31-39), we are free to share in word and in deeds of compassion giving glory to the only wise God forever through Jesus Christ (Romans 16:27) our Lord. Now may we go forth in service unto Him with His peace, hope and joy that passes all understanding.

Yours in Christ’s service

Larry Rice