



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Transformed Resistance

Romans 12.14 - 13.14

David Anguish

Introduction

What happens when people don't fit in their society? When others around them do not understand them? When their very presence makes others uncomfortable?

At best in such cases, others give the offending group some space, interacting with them only when necessary, but generally leaving them to their own lives.

Often, however, some lash out at the threat they perceive from such groups. For a moment, try to put yourself in the shoes of the ostracized or persecuted.

- What do you feel?
- What would you like to do in response?
- Assuming you can pay them back in some way, would you?

In the situation generally experienced by churches in our society, we will have to recall situations from school days or similar settings to do that thought experiment. But, as Paul assumes in our text, the early church experienced it as a church. Understanding their situation and his teaching can help us be more like Jesus and be prepared to respond appropriately should we face the kinds of pressures they experienced and that others still experience.

The Life of Christians in the Roman World

That the early Christians were persecuted is generally understood. Some of it was state-sponsored, more so in the second and third centuries than in the first.

What could others have possibly had against Jesus' followers who preached and showed love?¹

The Religious Setting

1. Religion was woven into the fabric of culture in the Roman empire and "the Romans were ready to tolerate any religion celebrated by an ethnic group" (Achteimer, 286).
2. But there were certain characteristics of all religions that people expected to see.
 - a. With so many local/state religions, those practicing a religion generally were from the same ethnic group. Christians were different.

- b. All religions typically celebrated ancestral (ancient) rituals that looked about the same. Those rituals would be led by designated priests who would serve as intermediaries to the god or gods. Christians were different.
 - c. The religion would revolve around a temple bSynagogues would have been seen as temples elsewhere. Christians were different.
3. Especially after it became obvious that they were not a Jewish sect, the Christians simply would not have looked like a religion to those around them in the Roman world.

A Politically Active Group?

1. “Looked at apart from Judaism, however, the Christian communities would have looked more like the kind of groups that proliferated throughout the empire and bore the name *collegium* or *solidatas*” (Achtemeier, 286).
 - a. These groups shared a common characteristic – a trade (e.g., tailors, wine merchants), place of origin, interest in an activity (athletics, music), a common age, national background, or being from the same neighborhood.
 - b. Again, the Christians just didn’t look like a legitimate *collegium*; yes, they shared an allegiance to Christ, but he had died for treason and was a mysteriously complex personality about whom Christians made extraordinary claims.
2. Why was that a problem? “Groups with no common ties among its members, the Romans suspected, were meeting for political purposes..., and such groups were strictly forbidden” (Achtemeier, 286). In other words, Christians, without typical religious trappings meeting together in groups that appeared to have nothing in common appeared to the Romans to be up to no good.

Resisting Those with Evil Intent

Romans 12.14-13.14 applies the principle of being transformed to living in a world at odds with — and often hostile to — the way of Christ. We should understand the unit as a whole before we look at its parts.

Let’s first see the flow of the text, which has four major sections (all generally understood in light of 12.1-2 generally and more narrowly in light of 12.9).

1. 12.14-18 – a general statement about how to respond to persecution: fight fire with love, support one another no matter what the circumstance, and do all we can to be at peace with all people.
2. 12.19-21 – statement of a general principle about judgment and payback, with Scriptural support (from Deut 32.35; Prov 25.21-22): leave it God.
3. 13.1-7 – a specific application of the principle: submit to government as God’s authorized servant (διάκονος, *diakonos*; v. 4) to avenge evil in the world.
4. 13.8-14 – repeating the call to love, again defined (see 12.10) in terms of good vs. evil (4 of the 10 Commandments are in 13.9); choose light in a world of darkness.

Three broad ideas tie these sections together (as seen in the repetition of key words and synonyms spread throughout the section).

1. God’s way trumps all other ways – always.
 - a. Repetition of forms of the word τάσσω (*tassō*), to bring about order by arranging things, or to give instructions about what must be done:²
 - Instituted (τάσσω, *tassō*, 13.1).

- Subject[ion] (ὑποτάσσω, *hypotassō*, 13.1, 5).
 - Resist (ἀντιτάσσω, *antitassō*, 13.2).
 - Appointed (διαταγή, *diatagē*, derived of διατάσσω, *diatassō*; 13.2).³
- b. “Authority” (ἐξουσία, *exousia*) in 13.1 [2x], 2, 3.
 - c. “Oppose” (NASB; ἀνθίστημι, *anthistēmi*) is used twice in 13.2.⁴
 - d. All of these words describe the action inherent in the word “lowly” in 12.16 (ταπεινός, *tapeinos*; see e.g., Matt 11.29; Jas 4.6; 1 Pet 5.5).
2. God’s way leaves judgment or payback in God’s hands – always.
 - a. “Repay / pay” (ἀποδίδωμι, *apodidōmi*) in 12.17; 13.7.
 - b. “Avenge / vengeance / avenger” (all forms of ἔκδικος, *ekdikos*; 12.19; 13.4).
 - c. “Wrath” (ὀργή, *orgē*; 12.19; 13.4, 5); rightly attributed to God each time.⁵
 - d. “Judgment” (κρίμα, *krima*; 13.2).
 3. God’s way calls us to do good and reject evil – always.
 - a. “Evil” (κακός, *kakos*; 12.17 [2], 21 [2]; 13.3, 4 [2], 10).
 - b. “Honorable” (καλός, *kalos*; 12.17; NASB has “right”).
 - c. “Good” (ἀγαθός, *agathos*; 12.21; 13.3 [2], 4).
 - d. “Love” (and “beloved” - ἀγάπη, *agapē*; 12.19; 13.8 [2], 9, 10 [2]).
 - e. “Darkness” and “light” (13.12).

Exhortation

As we consider these great principles, let’s return to our earlier exercise: try to put yourself in the shoes of the ostracized or persecuted.

- What do you feel?
- What would you like to do in response?
- Assuming you could pay them back in some way, would you?

Let me add another question: in light of Paul’s teaching in Romans 12-13, what loopholes do we seek or invent to avoid the teaching’s force and excuse ourselves from practicing it?

Consider that in light of the common theme running throughout all the big ideas we noticed above: God’s way. How committed are we to it?

September 8, 2013
revised October 6, 2018
www.davidanguish.com

Notes

¹ The following ideas are taken from Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 285-287. Hereafter designated Achtemeier.

² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), BibleWorks. v.10.

³ See Johannes E. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), BibleWorks, v.10.

⁴ The ESV unfortunately translates this “resist,” just as it does ἀντιτάσσω, *antitassō* in the same verse.

⁵ The noun for “God” is supplied by the translators in all three instances.