

Romans 12:3-8
(1 Chronicles 28:9-10; Matthew 25:14-30)
“A Call to Service”

Introduction

Paul has called us, in the opening two verses of chapter twelve, to a transformed life based on God’s mercies in the gospel of his Son. The call involves the consecration of one’s entire self to the Lord – body, mind and will – so that he might make us new and through us answer the church’s prayer, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.”

Now, in verses three through eight, Paul calls us to active service in pursuing the mission of God that stands at the center of human history and gives history an eternal meaning. But he knows that many of us are made ineffectual either through false pride or through false humility. One of these two afflictions endangers every one of us and many of us are prevented from ever getting on with the life that Christ has called us to live because we never come to terms with who we are in Christ and what it means to be a member of Christ’s body. In these verses, Paul offers a gospel antidote to having either too high or too low a view of one’s self.

It is crucial for us to heed this call to service in a way that is faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, not only for our own sake, but also for the sake of a contentious, polarized, fragmented age. Before the world will ever believe the gospel, it must see the gospel transforming a community of people, who have neither too high nor too low a view of themselves, and who are learning to live and love and labor in mutual interdependence, even as the parts of the body depend upon one another for health and wholeness.

Body

1. A word of warning to those of us with too high a view of ourselves (12:3-5): Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think.

The key: Judge “according to the measure of faith” means, not according to how much faith you have, but rather according to the gospel standard God has given you for measuring yourself. But what does that gospel standard of measurement show?

It shows us, first, our dependence upon Christ. Everything in the gospel flows, not from us, but from him. Everything in the life of a gospel-driven community flows from him. It is he who comes to our rescue and pours out upon us his mercy and love. He has united us to himself, and is the head of his Body. We are humbled to realize our utter dependence upon Christ.

It shows us, secondly, our dependence upon one another. Paul often employed the metaphor of the body because it speaks of our mutual interdependence. Just as one part of the human body suffers if another does not do its work, so too we need one another functioning in a healthy manner in order to have a vibrant gospel-driven community. We are humbled to realize our utter dependence upon one another.

So, the questions raised by this first point are, first, are we connected to Christ, and secondly, are we connected to one another?

2. A word of encouragement to those of us with too low a view of ourselves (12:6-8): Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.

The key: "According to the grace given to us." What does this mean?

This means, first, that each of us has been given gifts. Paul gives at least three different lists of spiritual gifts in different letters, and while there is some overlapping, there are also differences, so that we must never see these lists as exclusive, but rather as representative. Here, he lists seven gifts, the first three describing gifts of teaching, the last four gifts of service. But his point is that God's gifts to us are varied and each crucial to the life of the body of Christ. Therefore, we are encouraged to realize that we have each been entrusted with an important part to play in the mission of God.

This means, secondly, that we are accountable to God for actually developing and using our gifts. Just as recognizing my dependence upon other Christians humbles me, so too recognizing their dependence upon brings me great encouragement. But my gifts must be given away to accomplish their work.

So, the questions raised by this second point are, first, have I discovered and am I developing the unique gifts that God has given me for building up his people and pursuing his mission, and secondly, am I actually using those gifts in a regular, intentional ministry?

Conclusion

We live in a contentious, fragmented age that needs a living illustration of the gospel: A community living and serving together in mutual love, respect and interdependence, giving a reason for people to believe the life-transforming gospel of Jesus Christ. Are you willing at this year's end to take up the mission God has entrusted to every one of his children? Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.

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