

Romans

Proper Functioning In The Church - Part 1

January 17, 2016

I. The proper functioning of the Church

A. **Romans 12:1-8** . . . Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. [2] And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. [3] For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. [4] For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, [5] so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. [6] Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; [7] if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; [8] or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

B. Review:

1. Because of what God has done, as described in **Romans 1-11**, Paul urges us – in **Romans 12:1** – to respond to God’s gracious work by giving ourselves to Him with a holiness of life that is worthy of Him.
2. But to become holy in this God-worthy way, Paul says we must cast off those ways in which we have been conformed to the world and take on new ways of thinking – ways of thinking that will result in proving to ourselves and the rest of the world that God’s will is good, and acceptable, and perfect.
3. But we also need a whole-hearted commitment to holiness, and freedom from the world’s ungodly influences, and a transformed mind to live according to God’s will as described in the rest of Romans.
4. With that in mind, we are going to look at how we are to apply holy living and transformed thinking to our lives as a member of the Body of Christ universal, and as part of this church. And of course, though Paul makes only one minor reference to this in **Romans 12-15**, it is a clear fact that we need the help and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to live according to God’s will.

C. Prayer

- II. God has given gifts and abilities for the proper functioning of the church
- A. **Romans 12:3** . . . For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.
1. This verse is profound in that it conveys some truths that are not very obvious, and yet these truths are vital to living a normal Christian life according to God's will as a member of the Body of Christ.
- B. The first expression of normal Christian living that Paul addresses has to do with the **place** and **function** of believers in the church.
1. And the first thing he points out is that it is God who determines our place and function within the church. This is an important truth for several reasons.
 2. **First**, though there is a lot of room in the church life for volunteering, there is no place for self-appointing.
 - a. For example, Jesus selected the disciples – they didn't select themselves. God chose Paul and appointed him to a specific place and function within the church – he didn't choose himself and set himself up as an apostle.
 - b. In other words, just as God designed the human body with many parts that work together for the common good, so God has designed the church, and He has given it many parts that are supposed to work together for the common good.
 - c. Our task is to humbly accept what God has done and is doing.
 3. **Second**, though we are personally responsible for our spiritual development and the health of our relationship with God, we are to be responsible members of the body of Christ.
 - a. This means we are just as responsible for the church's spiritual development and relationship with God as we are for our own.
 - b. But it also means that how we live as individual Christians has a direct effect on the rest of the church.
 4. **Third**, because we are members of the body, and because the body works best when its various parts work together for the common good, we are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. The reason for this is that self-importance – or conceit – is not only a form of pride, it is a driving force for disunity. And disunity prevents us from working together for the common good, which prevents us from fulfilling the will of God – both as individuals and as a church.

- C. The next profound truth I want to point out about **Romans 12:3** is that Paul makes it clear he is addressing everyone, not just a few wayward Christians who have become conceited.
1. So why is he addressing everyone? Because we all are prone to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, and in our conceit, we are prone to judging others as less than ourselves.
 - a. For example, it is all too common for us to reinforce our inflated view of self by pointing out other's weaknesses, or by comparing their inability with our abilities, or by highlighting their bad behavior in contrast to our good behavior, or by focusing on their foolishness as compared to our wisdom.
 - b. And because of this common human trait, wherever Christians are gathered together there is the temptation to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, and less highly of others than they deserve.
 2. In relation to life in the church, one of the significant problems of self-conceit is that it drives a worldly form of competition. For example, it is common for the world to pursue positions and functions that bring respect, make them feel more important, give them power, or reward them financially. And it is all too common for the world to compete for these things by lying, cheating, being two-faced, praising themselves while criticizing others, and taking advantage of others for their own gain. And should they be denied the advancement or position desired, they get angry, blame others, or leave and go where they can get what they want.
 - a. Obviously, this kind of competitive spirit with its selfish behavior, critical attitude, and victim mentality has no place in the church. And it has no place because this kind of attitude and behavior is the opposite of Christ-likeness and the enemy of unity.
 - b. Was it not Jesus who said, "I am among you as one who serves?" (**Luke 22:27**) The reality is, we cannot be like Christ and compete like the world for positions or glory in the church.
 - c. Did not Paul say we are to have the same humble attitude which was in Christ Jesus – and having that attitude means doing nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regarding one another as more important than ourselves? (**Philippians 2:3-5**) In reality, we cannot have unity in an atmosphere of disunity.
 3. Therefore, beware of self-conceit, for it drives worldly competition, and worldly competition is a destructive evil in the church.

D. The next profound truth in **vs 3** is that to stop thinking in conceited ways we have to start using sound judgment, or sensible thinking.

1. To use sound judgment is to think in sane, sensible, and rational ways – and as Paul says, this is the God prescribed way to counteract conceited thinking. And the reason it works is because thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought requires using insane, unreasonable, and irrational thinking. Obviously, you cannot think more highly of yourself than you ought if you are thinking in sane and sensible ways about yourself.
2. Now in case you haven't made the connection between sound judgement (**vs 3**) and holy living coupled with transformed thinking (**vs 1-2**), let me make it for you. The pursuit of holy living and a transformed mind provides the foundational ability to think with sound judgment. The fact is, the kind of sound judgment that leads us to be humble servants in the church – as determined by God's will – cannot come from selfish living and conceited thinking. It can only come from godly living and transformed thinking.
3. Now I know Paul does not clearly state this, but his exhortation to sound judgment, or sensible thinking implies the use of **discernment**, especially in light of **vs 3-8**, but also in light of **chapters 12-15**.
 - a. In relation to our place and function within the church, **discernment** is the ability to recognize the difference between right and wrong, the common good and self interest, and between pride and humility when there are only principles, instead of clear cut rules to guide our decision making.
 - b. For example, though conceit is clearly an evil that drives such things as self-exultation, envy, and ungodly competition, it is not a clear cut evil with well defined characteristics that are always easily spotted and dealt with.
 - c. There are times when conceit is hard to identify, especially among Christians and in the church life where it is often hidden behind good manners, spiritual language, and a humble veneer. And if conceit is hard to identify in other Christians who are hiding it, you can imagine how hard it is to identify in yourself when you are living in denial of being conceited.
 - d. Therefore, in the absence of clear-cut rules, we need to use godly **discernment** to think honestly and humbly about ourselves in relation to our place and function in the church. For example:

- (1) We need to use discernment to discover the actual gift God has given us, where it actually places us in the body of Christ, and how we are to function in that place.
 - (2) We need to use discernment to discover if we are serving out of humility or conceit, and if we are doing God's work for His glory and the health of the church or if we are doing what we want to do for our own glory and whatever benefit we hope to get from it.
 - (3) In addition, we need to use discernment to figure out the extent or the degree to which we can function in the place assigned. But we will get to that in a few minutes.
4. Once again, godly discernment cannot be separated from holy living and a transformed mind. In fact, godly discernment requires at least the beginnings of transformed thinking. But to work best, it requires transformed thinking that is spiritually mature.
- a. Paul speaks about this in **Hebrews 5:13-14** . . . “For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. [14] But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”
 - b. Now because godly discernment is handled best by those who are spiritually mature, younger, newer, and less mature Christians need the older and more mature Christians to help them think through issues, challenges, relationships, and choices when there are only principles instead of clear cut rules to guide them – which is another reason we need the entire body working together for the common good.
- E. Paul concludes **vs 3** with these words: “as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” This conclusion raises two questions. (1) What is the measure of faith that God has allotted? And (2) how can we know the measure allotted to us personally?
1. The **first question**, “What is the measure of faith that God has allotted?” presents us with a scripture statement that is vague, and its vagueness has resulted in sincere Christians holding several different explanations of what it means.
 - a. Based on the context, I believe the words “**measure of faith**” refer to a God given confidence in the level of ability God has given us to function in our God given place.

- b. For example, God has given prophets to the church, but not all function at the same level. Some function at the level of Elijah, some at the level of Peter or Paul, some at the level of Isaiah, and some are limited to speaking truth in difficult times or situations. Yet all of them function as prophets.
 - c. Another example is the gift of leadership. God has equipped some to lead a group of churches, some to lead a single church, some to lead a missionary agency, some a Bible Study, and some the church nursery. All are leaders according to God's will, yet according to God's will, all do not share the same level of ability.
2. The **second question** brings us back to the use of discernment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the influence of a transformed mind, and the perspective of a holy life. And the second question is: "how can we know the measure allotted to us personally?" or more directly, "how can **you know** the measure **allotted to you**?"
- a. The reason discernment is so important here is because there are no clear cut rules or measuring sticks for determining the exact place or level of function God has willed for you.
 - b. However, the combination of a sincere pursuit of holiness, a mind that is being transformed, sound judgment, and the use of discernment – enabled and guided by the Holy Spirit – provides the necessary ability to discover, humbly accept, and humbly serve in the place and at the level God has chosen for you.

III. Conclusion

- A. A simple summary of **Romans 12:3** might go like this – God determines our place, our function, and the level of our function within the church. Our responsibility is to humbly accept the place God has chosen for us and cheerfully function according to His will – for it is in this way that the body of Christ works together in unity for the good of all.
- B. We have only looked at **vs 3** today, but – the Lord willing – we will finish **vs 4-8** the next time we look at Romans. So in closing, I will read **Romans 12:4-8 . . .** For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, [5] so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. [6] Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; [7] if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; [8] or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.