

Who Do You Think You Are?
Romans 12:3-5
#47 in a Series on Paul's Letter to the Romans
Faith Community Church – October 8, 2006

Introduction

The competition begins at an early age. “My father can beat up your father.” “My team is better than your team.” “My mom is nicer than your mom.” And on it goes. There seems to be something in kids that makes them want to be at the top of the heap. And if we’re honest, it really doesn’t end with childhood. Adults invest their lives trying to have it better than their neighbors, and they are not immune to wanting their own bragging rights. Witness the number of bumper stickers out there that say “My child is an honor student at such-and-such school.” One of my favorite bumper stickers takes it to the level of absurdity: “My kid can beat up your honor student.”

All of this is indicative of the fact that we want to have some sense of significance. We want to be somebody. So, who do you think you are? And how does following Christ affect how we answer that question?

The Only Way Romans 12-16 Makes Sense

About two months ago we took a Sunday morning to introduce this entire section, and this is one of the things I said: These chapters are about following Christ, and in particular about following Christ in the context of a group of believers that have a certain commitment to living as Christians together.

You see, behind what Paul has written in Romans 12-16 lie two presuppositions: 1) that the local church is God’s primary center for instruction, for biblical fellowship and encouragement, and for outreach, and 2) that if you are a Christian, you’re going to be a very active part of one. And if we are not on the same page as Paul is, what he says in Romans 12-16 has very little meaning to us.

Does this mean that Paul thinks that all we do is go to church or hang around Christians? Of course not, but these chapters are about learning to follow Christ in the context of a group of believers that have a shared commitment, so that our experience “in here” will enable us to live in a way that honors God “out there.”

Understanding Who We Are

Paul’s argument in 12:3-5 is this: *Our identity as members of the Body of Christ (the Church) requires a sober assessment of ourselves so that we can fulfill our responsibilities to each other.*

Let’s first understand what Paul has written in verses 4 & 5 and then we’ll look at the command in verse 3.

1. The Body of Christ (4-5)
 - a. The identification of the Church as the Body of Christ is common in Paul's letters (1 Cor. 10:17, 12:12-31; Eph. 4:1-16; Col. 3:15.)
 - b. When Paul talks about the church as a body, there are four main ideas that are a part of his discussion:
 - i. All believers are joined together in Christ.
 - ii. There is diversity in our contributions, as God has gifted us differently.
 - iii. Each person is important.
 - iv. Each person is expected to be functioning.
 - c. You will see these ideas in most of the passages where Paul talks about the nature of the Church. See, for example, Ephesians 4:1-16.
 - d. This is a critical idea in how we think about and "do" church. And we see that even more when we look at the main imperative command in the text in verse 3.

2. A Renewing Mind Helps Me Understand How I Fit In. (Don't miss the connection between 12:1-2 and 12:3.)
 - a. The heart of Paul's command in verse 3 is that we are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to. He expands up on that by saying that we are to think of ourselves with sober judgment (sound thinking) according to the measure of faith that God has given.
 - b. It is important to notice that this command is directed toward everyone.
 - c. Let's try to understand what Paul commands here.
 - i. First, I had to ask myself if this – thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to – is really an issue.
 1. I know that there are places in the New Testament where Paul talks about people who think this way.
 - a. In 1 Corinthians we see an "I'm better than you" spirit (or something similar) almost destroying the church.
 - i. Chapters 1-3 (1:10-17; 3:16-23) talk about the "my teacher's better than your teacher" syndrome.
 - ii. 11:17-22 talks about people who have utter disregard for each other as they come to the Lord's Table.
 - iii. 12:14-26 reveals that some had a sense of superiority over their giftedness.
 - b. We also read in 3 John 9-10 about a man named Diotrephes, "who likes to put himself first" and the trouble he was causing.
 2. But I have to say that in 30 years of pastoral ministry I've not come across this much, and I don't think that I've ever encountered an "I'm better than so-and-so" in terms of people in the church.

- ii. So how is this something that relates to all of us? The answer is that thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to does not necessarily show itself only in overt pride. Consider the following: we dismiss the contributions of others, we view some things within our ability as being beneath us, we claim that we are without any ability to contribute, or we stand apart & refuse to contribute. All of these have this in common: we've elevated our own judgment to a place where it is above God's judgment. There is no greater way to think of ourselves more highly than we ought.
- iii. The path to right thinking comes through a renewing mind. How?
 - 1. Sober judgment or sound thinking helps me see my place in the overall scheme of things. It helps me realize that I am not here to please myself, make myself happy, get all that I can get. That's foolish thinking. Sound thinking remembers that I am a living sacrifice, and that I am here to be a part of what God is doing.
 - 2. A person who is *think[ing]* . . . *according to the measure of faith that God has assigned* is a person who, by renewing his or her mind, has begun to discern the good, perfect and acceptable will of God about the area of their giftedness. We'll talk more about that subject in two weeks.

Responding to God's Word

So who are you? From what Paul says here, if we are thinking soundly about ourselves we will see that we are a part of something greater than our own little world, and that we have something that we must be doing to contribute to what God is doing in the lives of other people. We'll flesh that out a bit in the coming weeks, but the question this morning is can you commit – or recommit – to that principle for your life?

Maybe the first place you need to exercise sound judgment is to look at the issue of your relationship with God. We are not all “ok” with God. The Bible clearly tells us that our sin separates us from God and incurs his just punishment unless we turn away from it and trust in Christ as our Savior and Lord.