TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Transformed Esteem

Romans 12.3

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Introduction

1. Novelist Tom Wolfe called the 1970s the "me-decade."[1] In the 1980s I heard a speaker say that many of our world's problems come about because people *are* loving their neighbors as themselves. His point was that, because they do not rightly value themselves, they don't rightly value others either.

2. We may have needed the corrective that became the self-esteem movement. But, as some, educators and mental health professionals have pointed out, one by-product of the emphasis on self-esteem has been that some have too *much* sense of self, a sense of entitlement more than self-worth.
   a. That really should not surprise us. All of us tend to be like the little boy who was riding a hobby horse with his little sister and said, "If one of us would just get off this horse, there would be more room for me."[2]
   b. "Doing what I want" has always been the heart of sin (cf. Jas 4.1-3).
      1) When we are overly focused on ourselves, it is a short step from correctly valuing ourselves as beings made in God's image to an exaggerated view of our importance.
      2) That in turn leads to self-will and pride.

3. Paul's first application of his call to submit to transformation (Rom 12.1-2) is that we should develop the right kind and right amount of self-esteem.

Body

I. Some Matters of Foundation.

   A. Verse 3 begins and is the governing principle for the thought that continues through v. 8.

   B. But v. 3 also is intended to expand on what Paul said before.
      1. It begins with "for" (γάρ, *gar*), connecting v. 3 to vv. 1-2.
      2. Verses 1-2 followed from chapters 1-11 ("therefore," v. 1), and especially chapters 9-11 which focused on the identity and make-up of the community.[3]

[1] "1970s," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1970s. Accessed July 17, 2013.
[2] Michael P. Green, ed., *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 329.
[3] See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38_B (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 732.

a) Verses 4-5 make the emphasis on the community plain.

3. In 11.25, Paul had already stated the principle found in 12.3, telling them to "not claim to be wiser than you are" (NRSV).

C. This is the first order of business for people who are allowing themselves to be transformed as their minds are renewed.

II. Our Esteem Should Be Shaped By Grace.

A. Grace is the foundation for transformed living.

1. Grace, the basis of Paul's service (1.5), is a theme running throughout Romans (1.7; 3.24; 4.4, 16; 5.2, 15, 17, 20-21; 6.1, 14-15, 17; 7.25; 11.5-6; also 15.15; 16.20).
2. The idea runs throughout 12.3-8.
   a) The gifts (χάρισμα, *charisma*) each has are "according to the grace (χάρις, *charis*) given to us" (12.6).
   b) How we should think about ourselves depends on "the measure of faith that God has assigned" (12.3).
   c) The abilities listed in vv. 6-8 are also labeled as "gifts" (*charisma*).
3. Transforming people don't live based on our "own resources but always . . . in dependence on God" (Dunn, 734).

B. This runs counter to how we think and act as worldly people.

1. The Corinthians show what commonly occurs (1 Cor 1.10, 19, 25-29); again, the mind was involved (1.10; 2.16) and pride had its way (see 4.6, 18-19).
2. Paul will address superiority thinking in Rome (e.g., 14.4), but in our text he simply states the governing principle.

C. Can we really be so different? Only if we understand how . . .

III. Our Esteem Should Be Shaped by Renewed Thinking.

A. Everything depends on how we "think" (φρονέω, *phroneō*, 2x in v. 3).

B. Remember what precedes our text.

1. Verse 2 is emphatic that we are "being transformed by the renewal of the mind."
2. Agreement that we need to be transformed –- that "I'm [not] okay, and you're [not] okay" –- is necessary; it's about humility.
3. Paul's emphasis on the community deepens the point.
   a) "Paul has already warned the Roman Christians against thinking too highly of themselves (11.25). Being loved unconditionally by the creator God makes you quite special enough without imagining that your family membership or civic background can make you more so! Now he warns them again that they are to regard themselves, not as 'premier-league' Christians while people in other places or from other backgrounds are in a kind of second rank, but as simply various limbs and organs of the one body which also possesses many others."[4]

C. "Sober judgment" (see "*reasonable* service" in 12.1) submits our thinking to God's superior wisdom (see 11.33-36).

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[4] N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 2, Chapters 9-16* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), Kindle Electronic Edition: Page 71, Location 1075.

1. We understand that our saved status is not from our doing. The idea is that we should evaluate ourselves and respond according to the aspect of the faith we find most present in our lives.[5]
2. So, we understand that we are simply one of the "various limbs and organs of the one body which also possesses many others" (Wright, p. 71, loc. 1075), and in fact are "members one of another" (12.5).
3. We also understand that our abilities are "gifts" and so we will, in the spirit of humility, be glad to "use them" for the greater glory of Christ's body and as needed (12.6-8).
4. That in turn will lead us to see and treat our brothers and sisters differently (12.9-13) and to act differently when we are wronged (12.14-21).

D. The irony is that the real ability to accomplish great things that has so often been featured in the emphasis on self-esteem is found in humility before God, not exaltation of one's self. This is so because it is when we humbly submit and allow God to transform us that we become who we were intended to be.

Conclusion

1. Billy Graham once reportedly said, "The smallest package I ever saw was a man wrapped up wholly in himself."[6]

2. Paul calls us to think about and serve others. He understands that it's a changed life, a transformed life. It begins with what we think about ourselves: either we are most important or God is. What do you answer?

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[5] The phrase, "each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned" has been given various interpretations. Some take it in a subjective sense, the level of faith a person has, or perhaps even whether or not the person has a faith which is amenable to the miraculous. Others see it in objective terms of measuring against a standard ('the faith', though the article is absent in the Greek). Cranfield points out that the word for measure (μέτρον, *metron*) primarily means, "means of measurement." (C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary, Vol. II [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979], 612-616).

Certainly, any practice of faith should be measured against God's standard, but is that what Paul means here? It seems better to take it more subjectively, in light of Paul's reference to sound judgment. As Dunn comments, "The sober self-assessment just called for has in view the rich diversity of the expressions of faith (and grace): by recognizing that each is graced in some measure and each expression is indispensable to the community of faith, a false sense of superiority will be effectively avoided (as Paul argued at length in the parallel passage, 1 Cor 12:14-26)" (Dunn, 722). Once again, the idea is that each one should evaluate himself and respond according to the aspect of the faith he finds most present in his life.

[6] Edward K. Rowell, ed., *Quotes and Idea Starters for Preaching and Teaching from Leadership Journal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 154.