



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Transformed Identity

Romans 12.4-5

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Introduction

1. Philip Slate wrote an article, "The 80/20 Rule," which he begins as follows:

Likely you have heard about the 80/20 rule in connection with some groups: church, volunteer organization, school club, etc. It means that all too often only 20% of the people do 80% of the work done by the group. I suppose that is acceptable in a group where there is not that much work to be done. . . .

A good congregation should have more work to do than its membership can do! Why? Because the needs of encouraging one another (edification), doing compassionate service (benevolence) and evangelizing are never finished, there is always something to do. . . .¹

2. Brother Slate is not the first to make such comments. Even if the 80/20 numbers are not precise, something like it is too often evident. Christ's body is accordingly handicapped.
3. So, how do we motivate the 80%? How do we keep the 20% from growing weary and joining the 80%?
 - a. We can keep exhorting in hopes more will come around.
 - b. But, what if the reason for non-involvement is less about duty than identity?
4. Paul also exhorts involvement (Rom. 12.6 - "let us use them"), but grounds it in the nature of the church as Christ's body.

Body

- I. The Problem with "Me."
 - A. It is again important to stress the thought connections within the text as a whole.
 1. We start with "being transformed" (v. 2, present passive), moving ever farther from the norms of "this age."
 2. This entails a new view of reality, a "renewal of the mind" that calls for more than merely "doing different stuff" (being, then doing).
 3. At the heart of this renewal is a different way to think about ourselves (12.3).

¹ Philip Slate, "The 80/20 Rule," *Woodland Hills Herald* [Cordova, TN], July 14, 2013, p. 4.

- B. This is all significant for our study because the service Paul encourages in vv. 6-8 is the expected outcome of a different view of membership than many have.
1. Our culture keeps us focused on an individualized faith.
 - a) By the historic emphasis on individual accomplishment.
 - b) By the emphasis on *self*: worth, entitlement, accomplishment, fulfillment.
 - c) Consequently, “too many people conduct their lives cafeteria-style: self-service only.”²
 2. The “me-focus” fragments the church.
 - a) “The world around us loves to force us into disunity. We must once more be transformed by having our minds renewed.”³
 - b) It undermines the idea of shared responsibility in kingdom work (how often do we choose what we will do based, not on talents, but on whether or not *I* like a thing, want to do it, etc.?).

II. A Poor View of Membership.

- A. Some treat church like a membership at Costco or Sam’s, or a health club.
1. At the former, we pay our fee and go depending on what we need or want.
 2. At the latter, we do, too, but even more than Costco, involvement can be completely individualized; we never have to interact with anyone.
 3. Some treat church involvement like that.
 - a) It’s interest-driven: if this activity doesn’t fit/suit *me* . . .
 - b) Whether we attend this church, another, or attend at all, is optional.
 - c) Satisfaction [?] is based on “what I get out of it.”
 - d) It’s more like a group of individuals who gather in the same place to perform their individual rituals than a community.
- B. Laying aside the important question of whether “church membership” ought to be limited to meeting attendance, this does not look like what we see in our text.
1. “... we, though many, are *one body in Christ*” (12.5).
 - a) As the composite in vv. 4-5 shows, each of us is part of an interconnected whole because of common faith in Christ.
 - b) “[T]he picture of ‘body and members’ isn’t simply an illustration . . . It is designed to speak of the new human life which the church is to live and model before the world” (Wright, p. 71, loc. 1110).
 2. “... and individually *members one of another*” (12.5).
 - a) Given the analogy of the body, how could it otherwise, as we see when we think how our physical bodies work (a point Paul himself stresses more in 1 Cor. 12.14-26)?
 - b) This points to an interdependence not seen in the requirement model.
 - c) It also undercuts the ideas:
 - (1) That it’s not anyone else’s concern what we do.
 - (2) That we should let each one do what he/she will without challenge.
 - (3) That the make-up and practices of body members have to be homogenous.

² Michael P. Green, ed., *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 329.

³ N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 2, Chapters 9-16* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), Kindle Electronic Edition: Page 72, Location 1174.

- C. Paul lays to rest the ideas that we don't need the church and that our involvement at church is not really important.
 - 1. Speaking biblically, "individualized Christianity" is a contradiction in terms.
 - 2. As Jean Vanier said, "A community is only a community when the majority of its members are making the transition from 'the community for myself' to 'myself for the community.'"⁴

III. Vital Members!

- A. Consider the rest of Paul's analogy.
 - 1. We constitute a body "with many members" (12.4).
 - 2. "... the members do not all have the same function" (πρὸς ἑκάστην, *praxis*) (12.4).
- B. Consider vv. 4-5 in the larger context.
 - 1. Differing gifts, all needed, constitute the whole; diversity is the norm (12.6).
 - 2. The gifts are to be used, not as the "requirements of membership," but for the sake of the transforming body of Christ and his influence in the world.
 - 3. At the same time, Paul clearly expected (the force of "For I say..." in v. 3)⁵ this kind of involvement, not in the sense of a membership requirement (our "dues") but in the same way our hands are "expected" to perform their functions.
- C. The specific activities will look the same (though if we welcome more diversity, our gift pool will expand); the motivation is anything but.

Conclusion

- 1. Philip Slate closed his article by saying, "Remember that our Lord Jesus said that he did not come into the world to be served, but to serve. That is the way we should be, as far as our health and situation in life permit. Let us falsify the 80/20 rule . . ."
- 2. We are more likely to do this when we remember who we *are* than if we think of it solely in terms of what we are to *do*. May we all be functioning body members!

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⁴ Edward K. Rowell, ed., *Quotes and Idea Starters for Preaching and Teaching from Leadership Journal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 27.

⁵ See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 720.