



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Transformed Service (1)

Romans 12.7-8

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Introduction

1. In a hymnal I own, two songs about becoming a servant appear consecutively.
 - a. "Heart of a Servant" (Michael Puryear): "Give me the heart of a servant, Tender and faithful and true. Fill me with love, then use me, O Lord, So that the world can see you."
 - b. "Servant Song" (Traditional): "Lord, make me a servant, Lord, make me like You; For you are a servant, make me one, too. Lord, make me a servant, do what You must do To make me a servant; make me like You."¹
2. These songs assume:
 - a. That service is important in being Christ's people.
 - b. That becoming a servant involves a change from what we've been to what we should be.
 - c. That something is necessary prior to becoming a servant for that change to occur.
3. Our text, and the verses that lead to it, assume the same things.
 - a. Paul lists seven gifts in Romans 12.6-8; four call for service.
 - b. They follow naturally from the appeal for change Romans 12.2.

Body

- I. Selfless Service.
 - A. The two songs I mentioned are the last two of a four-song "Consecration Medley" selected by the editor. They follow "Make Me New" (# 691) and "Change My Heart, O God" (# 692). The combination makes me think someone had been reading Romans 12.1-8.
 1. Paul calls us to submission as "living sacrifices," using terms traditionally used to refer to religious rituals (12.1).
 2. That requires resisting our age and submitting to continuous transformation (12.2).
 3. His elaboration on the specifics of the new life shows how submission leads to service (12.3-8).
 - B. Thinking more about how the verses fit together, we see more attributes of the submission that is expected.

1. Looked at broadly, the section consisting of vv. 3-8 “calls for . . . the opposite of the arrogance and self-aggrandizement that need to ‘have it all.’ What is required first within the community is a realistic sense of how God has gifted each one with faith and how that gift might be employed in the community.”²
2. There is an assumption – not common in a world that encourages self-realization and narcissism – that the humble view of self (v. 3) that is content with being just one member of the body that brings glory to God is what “makes the church so rich and strong” (vv. 4-5).³
3. Only when we embrace our identity as one of many body members will we forgo our selfish concerns for the well being of the body as a whole and use our gifts (v. 6).

II. Savior-Like Service.

- A. As we saw in the previous sermon, “Transformed Speaking,” Paul’s gift list can be divided into two broad categories: speaking (prophecy, teaching, exhorting) and service (contributing, leading, acts of mercy).
 1. *Neither* group is more – or less – important than the other.
 2. We are ready to focus on the second gift Paul mentions – “service” (7) – not just as one of the gifts (which it is), but also as the defining category for half the gifts listed.
- B. In part because the word Paul uses (διακονία, *diakonia*) is so prominent in the New Testament, we believe it serves as something of a heading for a category and deserves more discussion.
 1. The three words are used 100 times in the New Testament: διακονία, *diakonia*, service – 34; διακονέω, *diakoneō*, to serve – 37; διάκονος, *diakonos*, servant [deacon] – 29.
 2. Paul used the words 52 times: διακονία, service – 23; διακονέω, to serve – 8; διάκονος, servant [deacon] – 21.
- C. We are so accustomed to using the words that we may not fully appreciate what they meant in practice.
 1. They “were originally used to denote ‘waiting at table,’ a connotation that was preserved in the NT period (see Luke 17:8)” (Moo, 766).
 2. They referred “to service of a personal nature and often carried, in both Greek and Jewish worlds, nuances of subservience and lack of status” (Moo, 766).
 3. What gives the word status is Jesus’ self-identification as a *diakonos*.
 4. But he also transformed the meaning from a typical self-absorbed focus (Mark 10:42-45).
- D. Humbled and grateful for the way of the cross, Paul used the words to teach that service is “the work that Christians do on behalf of others and to the glory of God” (Moo, 766).
 1. Of Christian service [ministry] generally, including that of himself and others (Rom. 11.13; 1 Cor. 3.5; 12.5; 16.15; 2 Cor. 3.3, 6, 7, 8, 9; 4.1; 5.18; 6.3-4; 11.15, 23; Eph. 3.7; 4.12; 6.21; Col. 1.7, 23, 25; 4.7, 17; 1 Tim. 1.12; 4.6; 2 Tim. 1.18; 4.5, 11; Phm. 13).
 2. Of the service [ministry] of Christ (Rom. 15.8; Gal. 2.17).
 3. Of the specific service [ministry] of collecting money for the Jerusalem saints (Rom. 15.25, 31; 2 Cor. 8.4, 19, 20; 9.1, 12, 13).
 4. Of a special function (office) in the church (Rom. 16.1; Phil. 1.1; 1 Tim. 3.8, 10, 12, 13).⁴
- E. The word is the perfect word to summarize the spirit of Rom. 12.3-6 (“let us use them”).

1. We must stress that in the New Testament, *diakonos* was not primarily about the position, the “office” (although such did exist), but about the *service*.
 2. Indeed, what made a person right for the office was being a superior example of service.
- F. It is with this perspective that we must understand the use of *diakonos* in Rom. 12.6-8.
1. Although some have taken it this way, it is doubtful that Paul has in mind the formal office or serving task associated with the word “deacon.”
 2. The point is probably not to stress “an isolated and individual act of service, nor a lifelong ministry, but various . . . regular acts of ministry undertaken by the same persons.”⁵
- G. Stating it as Paul does reinforces the New Testament emphasis that the essence of following Christ is service; he set the tone.
1. It is how he self-identified, clearly intended to be exemplary (Mk. 10.45; Jn. 13.3-8).
 2. To be serious about following Jesus is to rule out any notion of Christian service as a “hobby” we get to when we satisfy the demands of (what is often self-absorbed) living.⁶

Conclusion

1. Remember, this is Paul’s first point of emphasis as he considers the body, each member of which brings glory to God. It is in that vein that these words from Helen Keller are inspirational.

I long to accomplish a great and noble task; but it is my chief duty and joy to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.⁷

2. Let us be more like the Master who calls us to a new life and shows us how to live it.

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Notes

¹ Alton H. Howard, ed. *Songs of Faith and Praise* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Co., Inc., 1994), #s 693, 694.

² Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smith and Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2001), 192.

³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 764.

⁴ Moo, from whom this breakdown is taken, adds, “Only in Rom. 13:4 does Paul use the words from the διακ- word group to describe a ‘service’ that is not carried out by a Christian” (p. 766).

⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 728.

⁶ See N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 2, Chapters 9-16* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), Kindle Electronic Edition: Page 76.

⁷ Edward K. Rowell, ed., *Quotes and Idea Starters for Preaching and Teaching from Leadership Journal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 181.