

My Role and God's Will

Romans 12:3-8

Today we're going to continue to study in Romans 12. We've been looking at our calling as followers of Christ to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God to follow his will so that we represent Jesus well to the people around us. So far we've seen general instructions about how to do that – that we should be motivated by God's mercy, and that we should not conform to the world but be transformed by the renewal of our minds. Now today we're going to begin to look at more specific situations. The first situation is what God's will is when it comes to our roles within the church family.

One of the things we can tend to do is to think that our role and the ministries that are most important to us, should also be most important to everyone else in the church. I saw an example of that this 10 years ago in a church plant up in Birchwood. The church started because they had a very strong children's ministry in the schools and the parents started talking about how nice it would be to start a church together. So they contacted the Christian and Missionary Alliance and went through the process of starting a church. The time came for them to call their first pastor and they welcomed him with lots of hope and anticipation.

But after he had been there a while he noticed that the Children's ministry was kind of a sacred cow – it was seen by some as the most important thing in the church and had to be their highest priority. But the new pastor didn't see it that way. He saw it as important, but there were many other important things as well that were being neglected. So he attempted to get other ministries up and running, but it didn't work. He kept running into a clash in vision and direction with the people that wanted to keep Children's ministry at the center.

Unfortunately, within about a year the pastor wasn't able to make any headway, there was internal conflict, the church never took off and ended up closing its doors. Even the children's ministry fell apart. Things were so lopsided in one direction that the church couldn't move forward.

That story is an example of what can happen when people see their role or their area of ministry in the church as more important than any other. Paul had seen it in the churches he worked with so he addressed it in a couple of letters to help

the people see that error and what God's will is when it comes to carrying out our roles in the church family.

What is God's will for you and your role at East Lincoln? Does he want you to push the things you're passionate about to try to make everyone care about them like you do? That's the area of our lives and the church family that Paul addresses in our passage for today. He helps us see what the pattern of the world is that we need to watch out for and shows us what God's will is that we're to pursue.

Romans 12:3-7

³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

In this set of instructions, Paul mentions the worldly pattern right away – we are to not think of ourselves more highly than we ought. This has to do with having an egocentric perspective – thinking that my life is more important than the whole, my gifts are more important, my needs are more important, my problems are more important, my perspective/opinion is more important, and so on. This is very common in our world and in the church. What Paul brings to the forefront in this passage is thinking that your role in the church family or your ministry is more important than others or the whole. We often do this with positions of leadership and teaching, or positions that have a lot of influence, but it can also be any position or area of ministry that we are most passionate about (missions, evangelism, prayer, youth, children, etc.). And there's a major problem with that when it comes to the church family and how we relate to one another. It causes conflict and division and brings guilt and shame – “Why don't you care more about this...?”

So Paul says we are not to think of ourselves that way. We are to think of ourselves with sober judgement. Sober judgment basically means “with an accurate understanding.” It doesn’t mean looking down on yourself and having a negative self-image or self-loathing. Paul explains that it means we are to see ourselves rightly through the lens of faith God has given us. When we look through eyes of faith we no longer see ourselves or certain people as more important than others... Paul points out in verses 4-5 that we see ourselves as one of many important members of the body of Christ. Each part is important, but no part is more important than the rest or than the whole. We are to recognize that we each have a role in the church family and that role is important and needed, but it is not more important than the rest.

This was a big problem in another church at Corinth. Paul spent three chapters addressing it because it was causing so many problems. In 1 Cor. 12:14-26 he writes: *“For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”*

This is the way to look at your role and the role of others when it comes to God’s will. You represent Christ well when you don’t think of yourself more highly than you ought, but as one equally important member of the whole body.

Test yourself – what do you think is the most important role or ministry at East Lincoln? Did somebody come to mind? Why do you think their role is most important? Did you think about the worship leaders or the elders? Did you think about the prayer warriors? Did you think about the children’s or youth ministry leaders? If there’s a role or ministry that you think is more important than all the rest, that’s the worldly pattern of thinking we need to watch out for. Some of you may have thought about me because I’m the Lead Pastor. I think that’s pretty common in our culture, but it’s something to be avoided. The role of a pastor is important, but it isn’t more important than anyone else in this church family. Or, another way to say it is, your role is just as important as mine in the church family. Do you believe it?

When you came to church this morning, what if the grass was two feet tall? What if you received no greeting? What if the garbage was overflowing and there was a rotten smell? What if the temperature was too hot or too cold? What if there was no music? What if the mics didn’t work? All of these things matter significantly and if they were neglected would cause so much disruption, nobody would care about the preaching... No part is better than the rest, every part is important, and whatever your part is matters...

When it comes to the church, the worldly pattern can focus all the attention or glory on individual people rather than on Christ who alone is worthy to be praised and glorified. Therefore, Paul says, “Don’t think that way. Think of yourself with sober judgment, through the eyes of faith God has given you. You are equal in importance to all the other members and your role is to demonstrate the glory of Christ and not draw attention to yourself.”

That brings us to the last few verses where Paul talks about the importance of not only seeing every role as important, but actually doing something about it. Are you plugged in and using your role to strengthen the church for the glory of Christ or leaving that up to other people? In verse 6 Paul says: “*Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.*” Did you get that? We’re each supposed to use them. He then goes on to list a variety of them within the church that are important. The intent seems to be that for each of these you are not to think of yourself more highly than you ought if you have that gift.

- If your gift is prophecy, don't think that your ability to hear from the Lord is most important. Don't think that "Everybody should be listening to me!" If you believe God has given you a word to be shared with others, do so. Fulfill your role and let God use it as he wills to build the church for the glory of Christ.
- If your gift is serving, watch out so that you don't do it in order to be seen and praised by others. Do it with joy as unto the Lord, to build up the church for the glory of Jesus, whether anyone sees it or not. (By the way, I do think we should notice people's acts of service and honor them for it. But if you're the one doing the service, don't look for that honor.)
- If your gift is teaching, don't act as if your role is greater in importance than others. Your role is important, and you should seek to do it well, but it's not superior to any other role. Don't seek to draw attention to yourself, seek to give attention to Jesus. *"What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth"* (1 Cor. 3:5-7).
- If your gift is exhortation, which is giving godly counsel to people, don't think of yourself as a wise sage or rabbi that deserves more respect than others. Use your gift to strengthen and encourage people so that the church is built up and together we better glorify Christ.
- If your gift is contributing, or giving to meet the needs of ministry, don't think you're of higher importance because you have the means to make stuff happen. Use your money as a gift from God to build Christ's kingdom so he is glorified through you.
- If your gift is leadership, don't be like worldly leaders who seek admiration and attention. Use your gift with zeal to influence people to pursue Jesus and his mission, not to be impressed by you.
- And if your gift is doing acts of mercy, don't demand that everyone else be just like you in their level of compassion and meeting the needs of others and then

get frustrated when they're not like you. The truth is, they're not like you, and that's ok! Use your gift with cheerfulness to demonstrate the mercy of Jesus.

God's will is that we each use the gifts that God has given and you can see in all of them there's to be an attitude of humility and sober judgment – seeing yourself as one of many members of the body who are all seeking to glorify the head, who is Jesus. This is how we live according to God's will when it comes to our roles in the church family. This is how we represent Jesus well to one another and to the world so that everyone is drawn to him.

As you look at your life, what is God leading you to do today? Maybe you recognize that you've been putting too much attention on your role or ministry and you've been causing people to focus on you instead of Jesus. That's an area that needs repentance and humility. Confess it to God and pray for the power to change. As superior as Jesus was, he always walked in humility and sober judgment before the Father. He didn't elevate himself to a position of power and authority, he obeyed the Father. His will was to glorify his Father and he did that perfectly. We need to glorify Jesus by having that same attitude.

But some of you may err on the side of not fulfilling your role in ministry. Perhaps you've been thinking too lowly of yourself or been content with just being a spectator. God wants you to do your part. This is good and pleasing to him. You have an important role to play in building up the church for the glory of Christ.

Take some time as we sing some songs to pray and realign yourself with God's will this morning. Let the Holy Spirit bring transformation as he renews your mind.