

May 26, 2019

## Lesson 13: Called to New Life in Christ

Scripture: Romans 12: 1-8

### Context:

We conclude our series with a section from Romans, chapter twelve. As we close this series on call, we are invited to think about how we are called to a new life in Christ. Through this pericope, we are reminded that a new life in Christ begins with our bodies and goes from there to each of the gifts that have been given to us by God.

The final chapters of Paul's letters to Roman Christians focuses on how Christians are to conduct their daily lives contrary to the rebellious nature within humanity.<sup>1</sup> Grace brings with it new life and responsibilities for the Christian. Christians are given freedom from sin with ethical admonitions on how to do life.

The thesis for this whole chapter is that the gracious lordship of God displayed in Jesus is to allow oneself to be shaped by him rather than the lordship of sin that operates in the present world.<sup>2</sup> As Jesus is the lord of someone's life, they are radically changed with how they live. Christians are to be transformed so that they offer their whole lives to God. It is not just their wealth, their status, or their outside job. It is their whole body they are to offer to God. This is a radical statement especially considering the rising focus on the Emperor and the Roman Empire.

Paul continues his thesis by asserting that those who make Christ their Lord will be united to others who do the same. If a Christian community responds to the grace that is at work within it, they will display unity in their everyday life.<sup>3</sup> Paul says that the unity will be like that of a body, in which the diversity makes every part important. Like the body, grace is multifaceted and has different purposes.<sup>4</sup> That becomes evident with the gifts that each person is given.

Paul makes sure to list all the gifts that are in the body and their purpose. It is important to note that the list of gifts Paul gives is not to be exhaustive as Corinthians provides other gifts of the spirit.<sup>5</sup> It is also important to note there is not a hierarchy of the gifts. Leadership is not more important than encouraging. Service is not more valuable than giving. All need to be present in order for the body to work.

This chapter helps to give the early Christians directions about how grace works and how the people are to be changed. There is a direct correlation between grace and

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<sup>1</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, "Romans," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1985), 193.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 197.

concrete action that is extremely important. You cannot have one without the other.

### **Application**

This scripture passage is one of absolute favorites and was one of the favorites of my great-grandmother as well. There is so much richness in the text as we read about bodies being transformed and by all members of the body working together. Everyone is important and everyone is given a place not just in corporate worship, but in their lives.

How appropriate that this passage fall on Memorial Day weekend, a day on which we remember those who give their lives for others. In working with former veterans and in reflecting on their experiences, they are always quick to recall their former compatriots, whether they died or are still living today. You can tell by the passion in their voices and the tears lingering behind their eyes that they understand the importance of each person to the team and to the sad fact that losing one is like losing a limb.

I find the beauty in this passage in that it reminds us that the whole body of Christ has something to offer to the church and the community. Sometimes it is tempting to think that certain gifts and certain positions are more important than others. The western world in particular values hierarchy and elevation to the next “rank.”

To a degree, there is nothing wrong with a hierarchy. It helps create boundaries, clear communication, and can give direction to an institution or group. However, whenever the power or value is placed on one individual, it can create chaos and a failure of the body to move as a whole. Even if someone possesses the gift of leadership, it does not mean that they are the only one with the ability to lead a group forward. The other individuals with gifts are needed as well to help think of how to lead the group forward. And all can take turns doing so.

One of my dreams for the future of the church is that we would pay attention to this passage in the future. Our gifts are not meant to just be used in corporate worship or serving a particular area of the church. They are meant to be used every day in tandem with our relationships with others. We are meant to be transformed by how we live and how we see other people. There are no prima-donnas as followers of Jesus Christ. We are all equal and we are all needed to be followers of Jesus Christ in this world.

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