

September 22, 2019

“Thinking Anew about the Church”
Romans 12:3-8

FCF: Lack of reflection on critical things

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The first response to the gospel (magnet) is to think anew about the church.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

I was reminded last week of that refrain from the Book of Judges (**READ Judges 21:25**). What brought it to mind was a story about George Bishop, a University of Cincinnati political scientist. Nearly 40 years ago, he devised an experiment (**READ “How Two Academics...”**):

In a series of surveys, he asked a sample of people their opinion on whether the Public Affairs Act of 1975 should be repealed. Roughly a third of respondents offered a firm opinion one way or another. This was suspicious enough. A whole third of Americans knew enough about the Public Affairs Act to have an opinion on it? But there was another reason to doubt the results: There was no such thing as the Public Affairs Act of 1975. It was an invention, only for the purposes of the poll, but people felt compelled to weigh in anyway.

Bishop called such responses “pseudo-opinions.” And today our culture is absolutely full of such stances. It’s in the air we breathe. Which is to say we all suffer from this. We all do. But we need to reflect carefully on critical things - not just on policy issues but on spiritual matters.

Jesus would have His disciples to be far more discerning, not only informed but wise.

SCRIPTURE READING: **Romans 12:1-8** (vv.3-8)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Here’s a scenario. Imagine that a wealthy graduate of a prestigious university has given a piece of art to their alma mater. It’s a painting - massive in scale, a pleasure to view, priceless in value. The condition? It has to be hung in the main hall. The trustees assume that will be easy. So they go to the main hall and realize they have a problem. It might be okay over there but that would block the window. Other spaces are too tight. Then they realize that the ceiling isn’t high enough. So, to accept this gift and display it as intended, they’re going to have to knock down the whole building and rebuild it with this painting now positioned as the centerpiece of it all.

That, my friends, is what the radical message of the gospel does. The good news of what God has done for us in Christ is not something we can just add on to the old system. It brings a whole new system, a total transformation of our worldview, of how we think, see, and live.

That’s Paul’s message at the start of Romans 12. Looking back over chapters 1-11, he says in vv.1-2 that the only response appropriate to the gospel is to yield ourselves fully to God and to grow in a life of holiness. What would that mean? What is the first thing it demands? Paul tells us in vv.3-8. The first response to the gospel is to think anew about the church.

The first response to the gospel is to think anew about the church. In what ways? Three things. First, it means thinking anew about ourselves. Second, one another. And third, our gifts.

I. THINKING ANEW ABOUT OURSELVES

First, the gospel means thinking anew about ourselves (**READ Romans 12:3**). With the repetition, we see the emphasis upon the necessity of right thinking. Paul is really stressing this.

A) The Caution

And, as he does so, he lays down a caution, a clarifier, both negatively and positively.

1. Negatively

Negatively, we are not think too much of ourselves, constant self-elevation. Nor are we to think too little of ourselves, constant self-denigration. Think about it. Both are obsessed with self.

2. Positively

Rather, positively, we are “to think with sober judgment.” We are to be reasonable, sensible.

B) The Basis

But how? On what is our self-reflection to be based? (**READ Romans 12:3b**)

1. The measure of faith

This measure of faith is something that comes from outside ourselves that we have embraced.

What is it? The gospel of grace, our hope in a Savior who has both lived and died in our place.

2. The effect on the heart

And that gospel, that hope, brings humility to the heart. It has both a pride crushing but also a deep emboldening effect. “This is what it cost Him. But this is also how much you are loved.”

This is to think anew about ourselves - both what it means and how it comes about.

Illustration:

Let’s talk about pride for a moment. One of the mainstays of story time with our children years ago was an anthology of *Frog and Toad* adventures. Frog was the happy optimist. Toad was the grumpy pessimist. One of the stories was called “The Swim” (**READ summary**):

Frog and Toad go swimming in a river, but Toad will not permit Frog to see him out of the water because he looks funny in his bathing suit. All the animals of the forest slowly gather beside the river to see if Toad actually looks funny in his bathing suit, but Toad refuses to come out of the water and be seen. Finally, he becomes cold and gets out of the water, even though the animals of the forest are still watching. Everyone laughs at how funny Toad looks. Toad agrees he looks ridiculous, then walks home.

What is this story about? Pride in all its ugliness - in what it looks like and what it does to us.

Application:

It’s an ever present enemy, the root of the seven deadly sins. Which is why we need to preach the gospel to ourselves everyday that we would not think too much of ourselves - not too much or too little. This is the only thing that will give us that realistic balance for life.

To respond to the gospel is to think anew about the church - beginning with ourselves.

II. THINKING ANEW ABOUT ONE ANOTHER

Which takes us to the next point, the gospel call to think anew about one another (**READ Romans 12:4-5**). We are a body. Which means three things - unity, diversity, and mutuality.

A) Unity

First, unity. We are one whole. We cannot rightly understand ourselves apart from this.

1. Not something to aspire towards

This is not simply something we aspire towards. It is not merely a noble idea, a grand vision.

2. But something to live out

It is something we are to live out. For this is something we are now, whether we see it or not.

B) Diversity

1. Many members

A body also means diversity. It has many members. We are not a grotesque blob but a body.

2. Different functions

Many members, each with different functions. Doing different things because of unique roles.

C) Mutuality

A body is made up of unity, diversity, and then mutuality - belonging and dependency.

1. Belonging

Truly it can be said to each and every member, "You belong here. You are part of us."

2. Dependency

But then also, "Whatever you think, however you feel, we need you. And we need each other."

That's what it means to think anew about one another. We truly are a body.

Illustration:

Which rules out the impulse we feel to self-reliance. It's very American. And, wrongly applied, very unbiblical. You cannot be a Lone Ranger and a disciple of Jesus at the same time. It's a grand myth. The sole survivor of a group of ambushed Texas Rangers, fighting for justice in the Old West, living by his noble code. A grand myth. And a lousy image for the church.

Application:

The "means of grace" is a way of speaking of things Jesus uses to grow us in the faith. By them, we are matured and strengthened. Without them, we cannot really be said to be His followers. What are they? Prayer, the Scriptures, the sacraments, and the church itself. The church, this body of which we are a part, is a means of grace. Over time - as we live out this unity, diversity, and mutuality - we become more who Jesus intends us to be. Think about that.

To respond to the gospel is to think anew about the church - beginning with one another.

III. THINKING ANEW ABOUT OUR GIFTS

Which takes us to the last point, thinking anew about our gifts (**READ Romans 12:6-8**). Two things to note. These gifts are intentionally distributed. And are meant to be put to use.

A) Intentionally Distributed

These gifts have been intentionally distributed. It's not random but purposeful.

1. Gifts given

They are gifts given freely by the Lord to each member of the body. Freely given to each of us.

2. Categories

We can see categories. Some are for speaking, others serving. Some are public, others less so.

B) To Be Put to Use

They are intentionally distributed by the Lord. And they are meant to be put to use.

1. Particular gifts

There are seven listed here. The first, prophecy, gets our attention. In the NT era, this was not at the same level of foretelling and forthtelling as in the OT era. It had to be checked against the Scriptures. And any such gift today would still have to be submitted to that once for all standard. The main point being that every one of these gifts is not meant to be buried but to be put to use.

2. General theme

Utilized conscientiously for the common good. Utilized conscientiously for the common good. That's the only reason they have been given. And it's the only way they are to be put to work.

This is what it means for us to think anew about our gifts.

Illustration:

We see labels all the time that point us in this direction. "Use only as directed." It might be prescription meds or power tools. Utilized in the right way, they can be a great help. Utilized in the wrong way, they can be of great harm. It's the same thing with the gifts in the church.

Application:

As we grapple with this, some things should start to stir. How are you thinking about these things - yourself, those around you, your gifts? Have you really considered the fact you have been gifted? In what ways you have been gifted? Or how your gifts should be put to work?

To respond to the gospel is to think anew about the church - beginning with our gifts.

CONCLUSION:

We had some time with our grandson last week. He loves to play, explore, climb stairs, and read. Actually, that's "to be read to." One of the books I read with him was Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. It's the story of a caterpillar who eats his way through a wide variety of foods before pupating and emerging as a butterfly. I was intrigued to learn this book has been endorsed by the Royal Entomological Society. It has won numerous awards and sold nearly 50 million copies - about one a minute since it was published in 1969. So, how about that? This picture book about a little caterpillar moving through metamorphosis is now a childhood classic.

But that's us. We are this new creature. We've been transformed. We are no longer what we once were. Our metamorphosis is every bit as radical as it is for the caterpillar. Think about that. That's Paul's message. Because of the gospel, everything has changed. The old system simply cannot contain it. And our first response to this gospel is to think anew about the church.

Let me speak again to the Spiritual Gifts Inventory. Please take some time for this. Ask the Lord to use it to show you more of how He's made you, of the unique way you fit within the larger body. Take some time on this and send it in. That will then allow us to be better able to connect you well with our ministry teams. After all, we're in this together. Let's explore this together - who we are, how God has made us, and what He might have in mind with all of that.

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