

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon Title: Paul's Call for the Church to be Radically Different, Romans 12:3 – 21

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My two points today:

- 1.) Paul stated the importance of humility among Christians
- 2.) Paul taught that spiritual gifts are the result of God's grace

SCRIPTURE: Romans 12:1-2 “¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

INTRODUCTION: Last week I preached from Verses 1 and 2 of Chapter 12 and I pointed out that while there are no doubt the verses apply to individuals, Paul letter to the Romans was to a group of people. I challenged us to look at Romans verses 1 and 2 through the lens of the group, our church. Because, when Paul was writing to the Romans he was writing to a group of people. As Americans we tend to individualize everything; not every society does that. There are large societies around the world, where people tend to interpret everything through the lens of the group. How do we conform? How do we not stand out? As Americans we tend to want to stand out—American individualism.

When Paul wrote this letter he was writing to a group of people and he goes on with his advice to the Romans.

First, Paul stated **THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMILITY AMONG THE ROMAN CHRISTIANS**

SCRIPTURE: Romans 12:3 “³*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself*

with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you”.

EXPLANATION: In the day in which Paul wrote this letter, prejudice was pretty much at an all time high. It went beyond racism. Even within a race of people there were hierarchies and clearly some people were considered of lesser importance than others. Paul’s letter to them admonished them to keep their prejudices in check because now – to paraphrase – because of Christ, none of that mattered. I firmly believe it was Paul’s desire that this new concept and reality of the church bring about a revolution, a revolution without guns and violence, a revolution of Christian love. Paul wanted the rest of Rome to see the church as something uniquely peculiar. Something that, because it was so different than the rest of society, made it so attractive that people would want to be a part of it...that is, if they could set aside their prejudices and not think of themselves highly.

ILLUSTRATION: I served a church a long time ago that had a head table for church banquets. Susan (my wife) and I just couldn’t stand the head table. We knew we weren’t important and that no one else at the table was either and we couldn’t stand the pretense of the head table. I can envision a head table if the church is honoring someone, or for a wedding or anniversary, but for those church banquets it was just too much.

APPLICATION: The application is pretty straightforward. The church today should set the same example of equality. The church should be an oasis where people don’t think higher of themselves “than they ought” as Paul said, but a place where people realize when they walk in the door with other believers they are no more important than anyone else. And, when we leave the door entering into our mission field, realizing we are no more important than anybody else. Why? Because, the scripture tells us “for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

APPLICATION: Let’s expand this. There is no indication in Paul’s letter that he meant it for believers only when they were together. I believe Paul wanted Christians to get a taste of heaven while together and then apply to their every day lives. That’s what would bring about a revolution in society. And quite honestly, I believe the civil world as we know it exists because of the revolution that Jesus

brought to the earth so long ago, such as “Love your neighbor as yourself” and other things Jesus said.

Paul goes on to say why we should not think of ourselves higher than we ought.

--- Paul stated the importance of humility among Christians and next

Second, Paul taught that **SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE THE RESULT OF GOD’S GRACE**

SCRIPTURE: Romans 12:4-8 *“⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”*

EXPLANATION: Notice that the gifts are not given out as to importance of any individual. Prophesying (which I do not define as predicting the future but speaking truth as “truth-or-else” led by the Spirit), serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, mercy – none of them were listed according to one’s social stature or occupation. For example, Paul’s letter didn’t say, “Since she is a mother, she has the gift of mercy.” It didn’t say, “She cannot teach because she is not a trained school teacher.” It didn’t say “He is rich, so he has the gift of giving.” As I’ve come to understand it, many, or most, of the time those with the true gift of giving are those without much means.

EXPLANATION: So how are the gifts given out? Look in verse 6... *“We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.”* Grace is the key here. God distributes gifts out of grace and probably not in the manner we would expect. Just because someone is a school teacher does not mean that God has given that person the spiritual gift of teaching, and if someone is not a school teacher it does not mean that person does not have the spiritual gift of teaching. We cannot predict or speculate how God will distribute gifts in the body of Christ. I can say this; however, it is interesting how evenly the gifts seem to be distributed in churches.

APPLICATION: So when Paul said people should not think more highly of themselves than they ought, he connects that comment with verse four, stating that we are one body made up of many members with different functions.

APPLICATION: Let me explain as best as I can. The CEO of a large corporation might have the spiritual gift of service and may fulfill God's will for his life by serving in the kitchen. A minimum wage worker might have the spiritual gift of teaching and may fulfill God's will for his life by teaching the class that the CEO attends. Paul wanted the early church to realize that spiritual gifts could very well be distributed in ways that didn't make sense to them. But they began to realize that those social statuses doesn't matter because their relationship with Christ. Paul's thought was, be humble and be open because you don't know who has a gift that is going to minister to you.

I am convinced that any church not thriving is not thriving for two reasons:

- 1.) either people aren't being good stewards and/or
- 2.) People are not living out their gifts.

Think about it. If God's people are stingy with either their money or their giftedness, then the church suffers.

ILLUSTRATION: Putting on Christ was no easy task for the early church in Rome. Imagine with me Rome at this time. Imagine streets with people, but no cars. Imagine people from all walks of life on the streets together. Imagine the prejudices of the day and all the discrimination without any laws to protect minorities. In a very real sense of the word it was every person for himself or herself. If you had been categorized by society as less important than others, it would have been impossible for you to break out of it. And to be a Christian in the middle of this meant you affiliated with the oddest people in society. To become a Christian meant that you were willing to set aside all of these differences and associate with people you would not have previously associated with. Being a Christian in Rome was pretty much a death sentence.

APPLICATION: Right here, in verses 9 through 12 Paul presented the framework of a revolution.

Love in Action

- 1 ⁹ *Love must be sincere.*
- 2 *Hate what is evil;*
- 3 *cling to what is good.*
- 4 ¹⁰ *Be devoted to one another in love.*
- 5 *Honor one another above yourselves.*
- 6 ¹¹ *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*
- 7 ¹² *Be joyful in hope,*
- 8 *patient in affliction,*
- 9 *faithful in prayer.*
- 10 ¹³ *Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*
- 11 ¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*
- 12 ¹⁵ *Rejoice with those who rejoice;*
- 13 *mourn with those who mourn.*
- 14 ¹⁶ *Live in harmony with one another.*
- 15 *Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.*
- 16 *Do not be conceited.*
- 17 ¹⁷ *Do not repay anyone evil for evil.*
- 18 *Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.*
- 19 ¹⁸ *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*
- 20 ¹⁹ *Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*
- 21 ²⁰ *on the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him;*
- 22 *if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*
- 23 ²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

People, there is enough right there to keep us busy the rest of our lives!

CONCLUSION: The title of this message PAUL'S CALL FOR THE CHURCH TO BE RADICALLY DIFFERENT is a statement just as relevant for today as it was all those years ago. The Church as the body of Christ needs to set the example for the rest of society. And, if we made these 23 traits that Paul throws out to the Church, if we made those part of which we are as a Church out of the 23 what is our score?

If we worked on this together and we lived out this last part of Romans Chapter 12; I really believe that the rest of society would say, I don't know what they've got going on there but I want to be a part of it. Because, it is so radically different than anything I know. The church should wet everyone's appetite for more.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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