

Humility in the Church

by John Murray

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of humility and recognition of diverse gifts within the Church body.

Duration: 27:43

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:1-3, 1 Corinthians 12:4, Ephesians 4:7, James 1:17

Topics: "Humility"

Description

In this sermon, the Apostle Paul's plea to believers is based on the tender compassion of God. He urges all believers to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, which is their reasonable service to God. Additionally, believers are exhorted not to conform to the ways of the world, but to be transformed by renewing their minds. The Apostle Paul then introduces the concept of differences among believers, such as different offices, graces, and gifts bestowed by God. The most important consideration for members of the church of Christ is to not think of themselves more highly than they ought to, but to recognize that God has dealt each believer a measure of faith.

Transcript

If you turn to the twelfth chapter of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, of the third verse, the twelfth chapter of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, chapter three, the twelfth chapter, verse three, for I say through the grace given unto me to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. In the two preceding verses of this chapter, as we found, the Apostle Paul is giving exhortations which obviously apply to all without any distinction. You could not think of any differentiation as the exhortations of the first two verses bear upon all believers.

Because all believers, without any difference whatsoever, ought to present their bodies a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable unto God, which is the reasonable service. And all believers must be exhorted to be not conformed to this world, but by the renewing of their mind that they may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. But you will notice that the Apostle Paul, at verse three, makes a very significant change.

And he proceeds, for I say through the grace given unto me to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. And it is quite apparent that the Apostle Paul, in this particular verse and in the verses which follow, is going to deal with the differences which exist among believers. Now that's quite apparent, because even in verse three he says, according as God hath dealt to every

man, that is, to each one, a measure of faith.

They don't all have the same measure. There's difference. There is the distribution on the part of God, according as God hath distributed his own or her own measure of faith.

And then he says, for as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, they don't all have the same function. And then, so we being many are one body in Christ, and every one member one of another, having then gifts different according to the grace that is given unto us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith, or ministry, let us wait on our ministering, or he that teacheth on teaching, or he that exhorteth on exhortation, he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity, he that ruleth with diligence, he that showeth mercy with cheerful. There is the distribution of offices, the distribution of gifts in the Church of God.

And I take it that that is why the Apostle Paul says at the beginning of verse three, for I say, through the grace of God given unto me, and he is no doubt appealing there to the particular office that was given unto him in the Church of Christ. And it is in terms of that office, or by virtue of the authority with which he was invested in connection with that office, that he proceeds to give exhortations in their various offices, in their various... And the grace that the Apostle Paul speaks of here is very likely the same grace as he refers to elsewhere when he says, that to me who am less than this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. And when the Apostle Paul, in this chapter, and in other parts of, in other epistles, in other parts of this epistle, assigns to each one in the Church of God his own particular place, and prescribes for the Church of God the various offices that are to be exercised in the Church of God, it is in pursuance of his apostolic authority that he is doing that.

If any other person of the Church of God would speak as the Apostle Paul speaks in some of his epistles, it would be downright presumption that the Apostle Paul is conscious of his apostolic authority, is conscious of the authority delegated to him by the great head of the Church, and he is prescribing for the Church in all ages, that government and discipline, as well as that ministry by which the Church of God is to be carried on and governed. And consequently, there was a necessity that the Apostle Paul at this point should make some allusion to the authority with which he was speaking. And consequently he says, For I, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, You see the difference at this point between what you have at the beginning of verse three and that which you have at the beginning of verse one.

For at the beginning of verse one, the Apostle Paul based his plea upon the tender compassions of God. For he says, I beseech you, therefore, brethren, through the mercies of God, that is, through the tender compassions of God, that your bodies are lifted. And of course, that kind of plea is not by any means abrogated or suspended at the third verse, but the Apostle Paul now finds to introduce an allusion to his own particular office in the Church of God and the grace that was given to him to perform that office.

So he says, For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you. Now when we are thinking of the differences that exist among believers, and when we are thinking of the different offices, the different graces, the different gifts that God bestows upon the various members, what is the most important consideration that has to be urged? Just ask yourself, what is the paramount virtue? What is the paramount grace that people must exercise when they are thinking of the different functions particular individuals perform? Well, it is humility. Humility.

And that is what Paul alludes to here. To every man that is among you, not to more highly, there is always the danger that when a particular person is endowed by God with particular gifts, that he is or she is so liable to become so absorbed in the gifts which he or she possesses, that he or she will consider himself or herself more important than others. It's always that danger.

The danger of becoming, as it were, inflated with pride. The danger of selfless. The danger of overbearing.

You know, the Apostle John spoke of a certain person who loved to have the preeminence. And you know, always that danger, because it will appear sometimes in very subtle and deceitful forms. It might even appear under the garb of humility.

The danger of self-assertiveness, of overbearing, of being unwilling to recognize one's particular place in the body. You see how utterly inconsistent and even inconceivable it is in the human body for the hand to boast itself, or for the eye to boast itself, or for one part of the body in any way whatsoever to boast itself against some other part of the body. And that, you see, is what the Apostle is pleading.

For we have many members in one body, and all members have none. So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one member, so that instead of exhorting ones, instead of self-assertiveness and overbearingness, we ought to recognize our mutual interdependence, our mutual dependence, that we are members one of another. And if one member is honored, all the other members, or if one member suffers, all the others suffer with it.

That is what is done in the human body. If you have a toothache, it may not be a very important ailment at all, but if you have a toothache, your whole body suffers. If you have a... Well, your whole body contributes to that, and your whole body rejoices in this.

The whole body rejoices in that. And that's what Paul... that we should recognize, and that the whole body is not one. It is very frequently, in connection with office in the church, that this vice of pride, of overbearingness, appears.

And it has become, of course, a very great vice of the Christian church, that certain persons have tried to elevate them to positions of particular eminence, particular freedom, in the government of the church. And don't let us think that because we are Presbyterians, that we are immune to that vice. It has frequently appeared in the history of Presbyterian churches, and even a part of them, in their self-assertion, have allocated to them, to every man that is among you, not... You know, the great trick of this vice is what has appeared.

For there you have one man who has presumptuously allocated to him supreme eminence in the church order, has claimed for himself, and has even claimed for himself, that when he speaks ecstasy, he speaks infinitely, and that he is, as it were, the very... That, of course, is the extreme application, the extreme development of that particular vice against which the Apostle Paul is warning us in this particular text. To everyone that is among you, not to think of himself more highly, but you know there is another vice, and perhaps that is the companion vice, that so frequently appears even in the church of Christ. And that is, that because of the fear, people don't think, and that's the next virtue that the Apostle Paul enjoys.

Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, but to think soberly, but to think literally, so as to think soberly, but to think, so as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each one. And what is this vice? Well, it's the vice of a false humility, a false humility. For by a person

whom God hath placed in the church of Christ, and to whom God may have given certain gifts, not perhaps very prominent gifts, but certain gifts, and that person, from a false modesty, is not willing to take an underestimation of the grace of God.

And that is likewise a vice. If we are not to think more of ourselves, we nevertheless ought, according to the grace that God has given to us, and act accordingly. There is a vocation that God gives to each individual in the body of Christ.

A certain vocation, a certain position, and that person is to take his position and exercise the grace God has given to him or to her in that particular way. So as to think soberly, there is the danger oftentimes of people failing, sometimes because of falsehood, sometimes perhaps, sometimes because of evil laziness, and sometimes because of the fear of men, people failing to exercise the function or the office that God has assigned. And that is the other vice of not thinking.

If God has given a measure of faith, if God has given a gift, He has given that measure of faith to be exercised. He has given that gift that it may be exercised. We must remember that there is a certain responsibility devolving upon us in the Church of Christ for not to sit by idly.

It would be true that God has not appointed women, for example. According to His old institution, He has appointed men. And in the last analysis, there are women in the Church, so that as far as rules, there are certain functions that women, just as well, they are members of the Church, and therefore they have to discharge their responsibility, their function, always in the place that God has assigned them, but nevertheless in that place, and according to that measure of faith.

And that is what the Apostle Paul is enjoining in this particular passage. But to think, so as to think soberly, according as God has dealt to everyone, to the woman, as a measure of faith. And as you proceed to examine this passage, you will find that the gifts that God has, that the Apostle mentions, and that God has distributed, include every member of the Church of Christ.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy, or ministry, let us wait on our ministering. For he that teacheth on teaching, or he that exhorteth on exhortation, he that giveth, he that ruleth, abhor that which is evil. What I have been stressing, the unity of the body, the Church, that is the visible Church, each perhaps diseased, and the whole body is afflicted with that disease.

If that is true in our physical body, and if a particular person doesn't exercise, then and there, how the members of the body of Christ are mutually to support one another, mutually encourage one another, so that in the unity of the Spirit, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, and to a perfect man, and to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Let us pray.

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