

Application

A. Do you know what one of the most radical principles is in this whole section? It is that every Christian is called to full-time ministry. That very idea scares the life out of some people because we have a warped view of full-time ministry:

- We think it means moving to Africa
- We think it means no more free time
- We think it means big binders and 30 committee meetings
- We think it means looking like Mother Theresa

B. Believer, may I throw out the call to full time ministry today? Full time ministry means:

- You belong to Jesus every day, all day, in every way.
- You look at your studies, your work, your relationships, and your heart, habit and hang-ups through Jesus' eyes.
- You were given gifts when you joined God's family and the purpose of those gifts is to bless, build, and beautify the Body of Christ.
- You are a person of faith who lives with purpose; you exhibit an unusual amount of joy in everything you do because it is so fulfilling to be part of what God is doing in the world. You are generous, hilarious, and delighted.

C. I have three questions for you:

- Have you offered yourself to God? Then everything about you is according to grace. Life is a gift and absolutely everything matters. Don't take yourself too seriously, but don't take anything lightly because God is in it.
- Have you accepted how God made you? Then you can live according to the measure of faith you have gained. Each day can be a new day of growing in Him. Start each day with an upward glance, "God it's me, showing up for duty. What are you and I going to accomplish today?"
- Are you in full-time ministry? Then get with it! Engage your gifts, anticipate great results, expect excellence, and enjoy your blessings. Don't waste time – Jesus is coming soon.

Prayer

"Take A Good Look at Yourself"
Romans 12:3-8

1/17/10

RMBC
Pastor Dennis

Introduction

A. We pastors have been having some fun recently with a personality inventory that puts you in one of four colors: red, blue, white, or yellow. I'll let you guess who's who, but don't be surprised if you here us calling each other by our colors instead of our names (white guy, red man, yellow belly, blue boy).

B. How well do you know yourself? Now I realize that we can err on both sides of this question. Some Christians may teach that we should only think of others. Most of us tend to think of ourselves too much. But our text this morning reads, "Do not think of your self more highly than you ought," implying that we need to think right about ourselves.

C. Here's a secret about our text: Romans 12:3-8 won't make much sense until you deal with Romans 12:1-2. Another way to say that is: You can't answer "Who am I?" until you have honestly said, "Here I am." We learned in Romans 12:1 that to offer/present yourself to God is to say without reservation, "Here am I." Paul put it like this: (Read Romans 12:1-2, 3-8)

Think Soberly vs. 3 (Who am I?)

A. Someone said that we're all an expert in one thing: our handwriting. I kid Pastor Ray about his writing and mine isn't much better. But we can both read our own without a problem (usually). Now realizing this could lead to the misconception that we're also experts in everything else about us. Paul teaches us that it takes a measure of faith to really know yourself.

B. In vs. 2 we learned that allowing God to transform our minds and renew our thinking leads us to know his will. That's the journey of faith. If you could review all you have learned since you came to Christ you would realize that you have a greater measure of faith today than a year ago. You trust God more, you more readily turn to him in hard times, you see his hand in circumstances, and you line up more often with his plan for your life – that is the measure of faith God has given you.

C. Now Oprah and Dr. Phil will tell you to change simply by changing your thinking. Christian Science says you can get rid of disease by how you think. New Age urges you to tap into your mental energy and turn yourself into anything you want to be. I'm all for positive thinking and agree that attitude plays a large part in success, but God's Word teaches us to think soberly about ourselves in partnership with faith; in light of God's will.

D. I can think and think about taking Billy Graham's place now that he has retired, but "it ain't gonna happen." One of my sons wanted to grow up, live in San Diego and be the next MacGyver. He made it to San Diego but MacGyver he is not. He's a pretty good teacher but he's no detective. Here's the point:

Hoping and wishing and just thinking must line up with God's gracious gift of faith. He will help you look at yourself and say, "To be honest, this is how God made me, this is what he called me to be and do, and I'm really grateful with that. Thank you, Lord!"

Live Interdependently vs. 4-5 (Where do I fit?)

A. A great truth is that when you came to Christ, immediately you fit into the community of faith somewhere. The best illustration of the church and Paul's most frequent metaphor is the body. My body parts don't compete with each other. They don't want to be something they are not. Each of my four fingers and thumb on each hand accepts its role. So can we!

B. Two men, friends, were being considered for the key leadership position in a Christian organization. One of them described the challenge of the board in volleyball terms:

A setter is the one who gets the ball to the others. The setter has to see the whole court and the defense of the other team and then deliver the ball to the right hitter. A setter needs both vision and selflessness as she makes others look good.

An outside hitter has to get up in the air as high as she can and, at the same time, hit the ball 120 miles an hour at the floor on the other side of the net. Hitters have to be forceful, decisive and aggressive.

These two men realized that the board needed to decide if they needed a setter or a hitter to lead the organization. What was beautiful is each man, both believers, knew that if he was not chosen he hadn't failed. It wasn't a competition.

C. One of the unfortunate effects of living in a capitalistic society is seeing almost everything as a competition. Independence breeds competition, and competition breeds arrogance, and those qualities don't work well in the Body, not the Body of Christ. I wish we had a closet in the foyer where we could check our competition, our independence and our arrogance so that when we are together we are really the Body of Christ – not players in a tournament trying to see who will win (sing best, dress best, preach best, have the most friends – you name it), but parts of a greater whole – unit.

D. To change metaphors for a moment, if the church is a symphony, the pastor is not the conductor. I have to fight wanting to be the conductor all the time. I am the music teacher and each Sunday I'm teaching you to read music better, play your instrument better, and listen to the Conductor who is Jesus.

Serve Freely vs. 6-8 (What is my M. O.?)

A. As you look over the list of seven gifts in vs. 6-8 notice the spirit of joy and freedom that seems to exude each one. Words like diligently, in proportion to faith, generously and cheerfully mark the tone of employing our gifts. If Paul were here today I think he would say, "Get with it! Turn the gifts loose!"

B. I was reminded of the importance of acting on our gifts and convictions as I reviewed the story of what happened on a Montgomery, Alabama bus one December morning in 1955. A seamstress, not a pastor or elder, but a seamstress, a member of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, and a devoted Christian, acted on her convictions. A bus driver told her she must vacate her seat and move to the back of the bus because she was an African American and a white person needed the seat. In one of the most courageous choices of the twentieth century, she did not move. And she started a revolution. The next Monday night 10,000 people gathered together at her church to pray and to ask God, "What do we do next?" Because of that choice, a revolution started that was not easy; it had a high cost; many were beaten; many were imprisoned; some even died. But it changed the conscience of a nation. All because a mild-mannered, soft-spoken, Christ-following seamstress dared to act.

C. Pastor Rick Ezell writes, "Action is a rarity, anymore. We are content to let the other person do it. We are apathetic about situations, causes, and problems. Or we feel overwhelmed by what we have to do. We have been sucked into the attitude that says my vote or my effort or my voice won't matter, so why bother. What if Jesus had displayed a similar attitude? Where would we be?"

D. In contrast to "just sitting there" these seven gifts (not an exhaustive list) invite us to a ministry of freedom where we don't wait for the pastor or church council to give us permission – "we just do it." A heretical lie was started in the second century when the church fathers taught that people couldn't have communion or baptisms unless a bishop was there to supervise. That lie still persists today and kills the freedom that Paul writes about here in Romans 12. Don't buy the lie that your ministry isn't legitimate unless one of the pastors is there. If the Spirit prompts you – get with it! "Just do it." You may start a revolution.

E. Now it's true that spiritual gifts seem to fall into two categories – speaking and serving. Speaking gifts take thoughtful preparation so that the one speaking is faithful to God's word. To lead "diligently" in part means, "don't wing it." Listen to God.

Serving gifts require good/pure motives. Giving generously actually refers to simplicity, without calling attention to yourself. The word "cheerful" can be translated "hilarity." Check motives.