

Session 4

November 8, 2020

COMMITTED TO HIS CHURCH

Romans 12:3-16

Both church attendance and church membership have been in a steady decline for mainline Christian denominations since about 1970. Southern Baptists were able to hold off that trend until the mid-1990s. But a troubling SBC *Annual Church Profile* released just a few months ago showed a dramatic drop in SBC church membership last year; the biggest drop in over 100 years! Such findings ought to make us not only examine our evangelism and outreach methodologies, but also re-emphasize the essence and role of the New Testament church. She is, after all, the Bride of Christ! If there was ever a need for an “*All In*” *Commitment* to the church, that need is today.

In this week’s text, Paul emphasizes the individual believer’s role and responsibility in the life of the church. Three distinct areas are mentioned.

Sensibility in thought (vv. 3-5). In the first verses of Romans 12, Paul reminded church members to present themselves as living sacrifices (v. 1) and to be transformed “by the renewing of the mind” (v. 2). Having provided the broad overview, the apostle then filled in some of the details. The beginning point of the renewed mind is *perspective*. To think *sensibly* (translated *soberly* in older translations) means “to be of sound mind.” Believers are to think *soberly* about themselves. There is no room for the haughty and proud in the body of Christ. A renewed mind understands that God is the One who gives out faith to every believer (v. 3). Second, believers are to see themselves as *parts* of the body. According to verse 4, the body of Christ is like the human body; it is made of numerous parts all of which have different functions. Verse 5 is a little awkward, but basically, it teaches two truths: (1) the body of Christ is made up of many different members, and yet, (2) while those members function independently, they do depend on one another to insure the body functions properly. For reflection: *Why do you think God’s word uses the analogy of a body to describe the function of the church?*

Fullness in action (vv. 6-8). Here, the emphasis is on function. The members of the body are all given spiritual gifts, not to be lauded, but to be used in the ministry of the church. These verses name several of the gifts with the exhortation to use those gifts to the fullest measure that one’s faith allows (v. 6). The first example named is *prophecy*. This suggests both hearing from God and speaking on His behalf. Verse 7 mentions *service* (or *ministry*) which is derived from the same word as “deacon;” and *teaching* (or instruction). These are followed by *exhorting* (or *encouraging*) in verse 8. These four gifts are grouped first, perhaps having to do most with the handling of God’s word, from its proclamation to its application. The second set seems to focus more on interpersonal relationships within the body. In verse 8, *giving* is to be done with *generosity* (that is, without prejudice or “strings attached”); *leading* is to be done with *diligence* (or *haste*); and the showing of mercy is to be done with *cheerfulness* (or *tender care*). Again, all the gifts are to be exercised with full commitment of the “measure of faith” entrusted by God (v. 6). For reflection: *Part of our commitment to the church is exercising the spiritual gifts that God gives. Do you see clear and compelling evidence of these gifts being exercised in your congregation?*

Humility in attitude (vv. 9-16). The remaining verses in the focal text read like a “laundry list” of “do’s and don’ts” for the body’s behavior. The list begins with purity of love and ends with honest personal evaluation. Yet the singular theme of *deep humility* runs throughout. Things and thoughts that contradict Christian values (like evil, sloth, cursing those who attack, pride and arrogance) are to be rejected and replaced with the godly attributes of goodness, affection, honor, service, joy, hope, patience, prayer, giving, hospitality, empathy, conciliation, and personal humility. For reflection: *If those in Christ are “living sacrifices” (Rom. 12:1) and “new creations” (2 Cor. 5:17), why does Paul find it necessary to point out the flaws in believers and encourage Christian character? What’s going on here?*