



St. Paul's Lutheran Church
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The Epistle of Romans

The Justification of the Ungodly

Paul now shifts to the attitude and orientation of the Christian. Two things are obvious for the apostle Paul. First, we must consider our vocation or station in life. And second, we must not think too highly of ourselves. We are not as important as we like to think.

With respect to our vocation, it is important to understand that the church is not an association of like minded individuals. It is a very misguided view of the church to expect people in the church to dress the same, talk the same, and have the same personalities. Considering the metaphor of the body, not everyone is a hand. Not everyone is a foot. Think of how dysfunctional the church would be with 15 feet or 32 hands! How awful it is when religious leaders try to make everyone act and be like a hand or be like a foot!

The church, though, is also not a disjointed group of individuals. The church does not consist of separate body parts, but parts of the body that are joined together as one. The church consists of different people from different backgrounds with different tastes and likes, who are joined together into the body of Christ through the

Romans 12:3-13

Sacraments of Baptism and Communion. Indeed, there is one baptism, not two or three. There is one Lord's Table, not many tables. And so, no part of the body is less than the other. How awful it is when church leadership ranks or communicates that some people are more a part of the body of Christ than others.

So, as previously mentioned there are different vocations and stations within the body of Christ. They are different distinctions of service to one another. And so, Paul secondly calls us to not think too highly of ourselves than we ought to. You see, what can happen is that pride can creep into the church, which leads to pride ranking parishioners' vocations above each other. As a result, a hierarchy of power can develop in the church. But this is not how the church functions. The vocations in life and the power/grace given to people in these vocations is for the purpose of self-sacrifice to one's neighbor. God's grace is never intended to prop oneself up in the body of Christ but is always meant for the service of another.

This perhaps leads to a very important question. How

are we to serve one another? As previously mentioned, there are different vocations in the body of Christ – different ways in which we serve each other. Some of these vocations function in the realm of mercy care. Some of these vocations function in the realm of administration. Some of these vocations function in the realm of ministry via the Word and Sacraments. And so, we not only serve one another according to our vocation but also according to what is good, right, and salutary. And how we know what is good, right, and salutary is through the Word. What this means is that we are not called to serve each other's selfish and sinful desires. A pastor serves his congregation by not tickling their ears but preaching the Word of God. Parishioners are called to acts of mercy but certainly not called to acts of enablement of sin. The vocations we are called into are services of love, and love is defined by self-sacrifice and the 10 Commandments.

Pulling all of this together, we recognize that there are different vocations a part of the one church. Each vocation serves a purpose of blessing another person. These vocations are not ladders to power or control but ways of humble service and love. And service and love are not defined by the sinful wants of parishioners and neighbors but what is good, right, and salutary according to the Word. Therefore, each part of the body of Christ will function in harmony with other parts when acts are done not for power but for service. Each part of the body will function in harmony with one another when individuals do not think too highly of themselves than they ought to. No one person can be all parts of the body, so all parts are needed and should be respected.

As a way a reflection consider the following questions:

- 1) What happens to churches that fail to realize that there are different parts of the one same body?
- 2) What happens to churches that fail to realize that the different parts belong to the one same body?
- 3) What happens to a church when pride takes hold of a vocation, and the person thinks too highly of themselves than they ought to?
- 4) What happens to a church when people serve one another according to their wants and desires and not according to what is good, right, and salutary in the Word of God?
- 5) How does the Table of Duties in the Small Catechism help us understand this topic better?

