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ROMANS 12:3-8 AND AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

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The following paper is an exegetical study of Romans 12:3-8 against the backdrop of authentic leadership. The focus is to understand Paul's command to not think too highly of one's self, but with "sober judgement." By considering the important findings from exegetical research I conclude that accurate self-knowledge is tied to communal identity and healthy interdependence. This foundational exegetical implications has practical application within leadership studies. Therefore, Paul's words to the church in Rome provide insight into the leadership theory of authentic leadership. One of the highest values of authentic leadership is consistency; consistency with self, thinking, others, and behaviors. Romans 12:3-8 elevates the value of consistency to alignment with the Gospel, and thus helps to develop authentic leadership from a Christian perspective. By applying the exegetical research findings of Romans 12:3-8 to authentic leadership this paper offers guidance to develop important aspects of a uniquely Christian authentic leader.

I. INTRODUCTION

Paul's letter to the Romans is perhaps one of the most theologically significant in the New Testament (Carson & Moo, 2005). While theologically rich, Romans also has significant emphasis on the Christian life applied in daily living (Moo, 1996). The focus of this paper is on Romans 12:3-8, with a concentration on 12:3,

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned (ESV).

Following Osborne's (2006) method for exegetical study I will draw out the key principles and themes of the text. By studying the genre, purpose and occasion,

historical background, literary structure, and the significant lexical-grammatical constructions of the pericope I will offer insight into the meaning and intent of the text. Romans 12:3 expresses the imperative of the pericope, to not think too highly of self, but to think “soberly.” Specifically, I will focus on the question I believe naturally follows, “What does it mean to think of one’s self accurately?” Based on the exegetical understanding of Romans 12:3-8 I will then explain the key observations that benefit leadership studies, and particular the theory of Authentic Leadership.

II. EXEGESIS OF ROMANS 12:3-8

Genre

Romans is an epistle, a formal letter from one person to another. In the Greco-Roman world letter writing became an “established and popular method of communication” (Carson & Moo, 2005, p. 332). New Testament epistles follow a typical structure; greeting, body, and conclusion (Stowers, 1986). In many of the New Testament epistles the greeting includes the identification of the author (Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude), which in this case is Paul. Letters may take a variety of forms, from informal and casual, to formal and meant for a broad audience. Romans’ form and structure as a letter is clearly formal and can be described as a “tractate letter, one that has as its main component a theological argument or series of arguments” (Carson & Moo, 2005, p. 402). Therefore, following the logical and rhetorical argument Paul is making in his letter to the church in Rome is important to understanding the significance of Romans 12:3-8.

Osborne (1991) helps to illustrate the importance of genre analysis when he says, “genre functions as a valuable link between the text and the reader” (p. 182). Thus, understanding the style of rhetoric employed will allow the reader to more accurately nuance their interpretation. There is debate about whether Paul was paralleling other forms of epistolary structure, either from his Jewish background or contemporary Greco-Roman context. However, most scholars conclude that while he was clearly influenced by these styles it is too narrow a view to use the parallels as an interpretive guide (Anderson, 1996; Hengel & Schwemer, 1997; Dunn, 1993). Dunn (1993) argues that one of the best descriptions of Paul’s epistle to the Romans is diatribe, “dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor” (p. 841). Stowers (1981) adds that one of the primary purposes of diatribe is to lead fellow students toward truth. With this in mind, reading Romans 12:3-8 becomes more than just the body of a letter, it becomes part of a key argument meant to lead the reader, and contemporary interpreter, toward a particular conclusion.

Purpose and Occasion

A brief overview of the purpose and occasion of Romans will add additional insight into the deeper textual study of the pericope. Paul did not establish the church in Rome, or ever traveled to Rome, which creates a sociological connection to his purpose in writing more difficult. Therefore, Moo (1996) argues that Paul’s introduction in

Romans 1:1-7, which is the longest of all his New Testament letters, is trying “to establish his credentials as an apostle with a worldwide commission to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ” (p. 40). Many introductory prescripts will state an explicit purpose in writing, but Romans does not have any such explicit statement. Paul emphasizes his service to Jesus Christ and his call as an apostle “for the gospel of God” in Romans 1:1, while 1:2-7 modifies it as a mini treatise on salvation history. Many scholars have concluded that Paul’s purpose is best described as advancing his mission by uniting churches under the gospel (Schreiner, 1998, p. 22). Dunn (1991) nuances the primary gospel purpose seeing three specific intents interwoven throughout: a missionary purpose, an apologetic purpose, and a pastoral purpose (pp. 839-840).

Chapter 12 begins a new subsection within Romans setting up Paul’s focus on the practical application of gospel truth for Christian living (Dunn, 1988; Schreiner, 1998; Moo, 1996; & Morris, 1988). Paul’s emphasis is that the response to the mercy of the gospel is a life lived as a living sacrifice of worship (Romans 12:1).

Historical Context

There is debate about who Paul was writing to, but most would argue that it is either a Jewish audience, a Gentile audience, or both (Carson & Moo, 2005, pp. 394-398). The best evidence for a mixed audience is the historical reality of Jewish exile and migration at the time of Paul’s writing, approximately A.D. 55-58 (Schreiner, 1998, p. 3). Carson & Moo (2005) argue that the most plausible genesis of the Roman church is that “Jews converted on the Day of Pentecost” returned from their pilgrimage to the densely Jewish Rome of the first century B.C. (p. 395). Therefore, when the Roman emperor Claudius (A.D. 49-54) decreed the expulsion of all Jews in A.D. 49 it is likely that Gentile Christians may have flourished in Rome, which is why most scholars believe that upon the Jewish return in A.D. 54 the Roman church was primarily Gentile dominant (Schreiner, 1998).

The shifting landscape of Christian leadership in Rome paints the best picture of the social and historical background. Following Schriene (1998), it appears that Paul is writing to a mixed (Gentile and Jewish) audience brought up in the cultural ideals of the first century Greco-Roman world. Rome was an urban epicenter with nearly one million citizens (Reasoner, 1991). The major cultural influences of the day were marked by ethnic diversity, state controlled religion, a legal orientation toward religion and ritual, and an emphasis on rational thinking (Reasoner, 1991). Thus, when Paul uses the illustration of the body and its members in Romans 12:4-5 this would have made sense to a first century Roman denizen since there was a natural framework for societal classes and specific roles (Kenner, 1993, p. 439). Paul’s theological emphasis on reconciliation and unity throughout Romans, with the practical metaphor of the body in chapter 12, produce clarity in light of the unique historical and social background.

Structural Analysis

There are three aspects to understanding the structure of Romans 12:3-8: 1) the main thematic structure of Romans as an entire book, 2) the thought movements of

Paul's argument specifically in chapter 12, and 3) the structure and development of the pericope itself. I believe that Moo's (1996) structural analysis of the entire book Romans helps to frame the large movements and headline the theological significance of the book (see Table 1).

With this framework in mind I have created my own thematic analysis of Romans 12 to illustrate the movements of the chapter and immediate context of the pericope (see Table 2). A grammatical analysis of the Romans 12:3-8 (see Table 3) demonstrates that 12:3 is the primary focus of the whole pericope, while the remaining verses serve to illustrate and define. The rationale for this conclusion is based on the fact that the primary imperatives, both positive and negative, are stated in 12:3.

Table 1

Structural Overview of Romans (Moo, 1996)

The Heart of the Gospel	The Assurance Provided by the Gospel	The Defense of the Gospel	The Transforming Power of the Gospel
1:18-4:25	5:1-8:39	9:1-11:36	12:1-15:13

Table 2

Thematic Outline of Romans 12

12:1-2	Call to <i>think</i> and <i>live</i> differently as a Christian	Intro
12:3-8	Call to <i>think</i> rightly about self and others as a Christian	Part 1
12:9-21	Call to <i>live</i> (love) rightly as Christian	Part 2

Lexical / Grammatical Significance

Romans 12:3-8 has a number of significant syntactical constructions that should be studied in depth. I will present a brief overview of two areas of focus that I believe have the most relevance for this particular study. First, and most significant, is Paul's play on the verb "to think" since the root word is the same for the verb "to think" and the modifier "sober judgement". He begins with the negative imperative to not "think" followed by an infinitive construction "to think" to emphasize the manner and quality in which one is reason (Moo, 1996, p. 760). Paul uses this same verb and construction in 2 Corinthians 5:13 translated, "if we are in our right mind", and often uses its cognate throughout Romans to emphasize the way to think (Romans 8:5, 11:20). Moo (1996) states throughout Pauline literature "to think" is meant to "denote a quality of steady, clearheaded understanding of the believer and his or her world that recognizes the truth of the gospel" (p. 760). In addition, Dunn (1988) notes that the particular Greek construction would have also struck a chord with readers since the root word was used in "popular Hellenistic philosophy denoting modesty and restraint" and came to be viewed a cardinal virtue (p. 721).

Table 3

Grammatical Analysis of Romans 12:3-8

2:3	For by the grace given to me	individual
	I say to everyone among you	corporate
	not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think,	imperative -
	but to think with sober judgment,	imperative +
	↑ each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.	how
2:4	For as in one body we have many members and the members do not all have the same function	individual / corporate
2:5	so we,	corporate
	↑ though many,	corporate
	↑ are one body in Christ,	individual
	↑ and individually members one of another.	individual / corporate
2:6	Having gifts that differ	
	↕ according to the grace given to us	how
	let us use them:	imperative
	if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;	example 1
	if service, in our serving;	example 2
	the one who teaches, in his teaching;	example 3
	the one who exhorts, in his exhortation;	example 4
	the one who contributes, in generosity;	example 5
	the one who leads, with zeal;	example 6

the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

example 7

Second, the expression “*measure of faith*” (12:3c) has scholars divided about the meaning and best translation. A cursory review of modern Bible translations demonstrates the varied perspectives: a) ESV - “each according to the measure of faith God has assigned”, b) NIV - “the faith God has distributed”, c) NASB - “as God has allotted to each a measure of faith”, d) NKJV - “as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith”. There are two primary interpretations of the expression. The first perspective, held by Goodrich (2012) and Poirer (2008), is that the Greek should be translated “a measure, namely a trusteeship” or “a measure of stewardship”. The basis for this translation revolves around parallel Greco-Roman literature, other Pauline uses (cf. Ephesians 4:7), and the immediate context in Romans where Paul continues to stress his calling and ministry (Goodrich, 2012). The second perspective, and more widely held by scholars, is that the Greek should be translated “a measure of faith”, meaning a standard, not an amount, giving Christian faith to every believer, salvation (Cranfield, 1962; Dunn, 1988; Moo, 1996; Morris, 1988). The emphasis on this translation fits well with the gospel-oriented theme of the entire book for Romans and allows Paul to call for equity in exercising giftedness since the same faith was given to all. I support this perspective because it makes the most sense when the mixed Jewish and Gentile audience is considered. It is as if Paul is reminding the church in Rome that their Christian origin is the same and should influence their view of one another.

Exegetical Summary

In summary of the exegetical process of Romans 12:3-8, it is important to consider the genre, purpose and occasion, historical context, the structural analysis of the passage within its broader context, and the significant lexical-grammatical constructions. On the basis of this exegetical process, it is reasonable to conclude that Paul’s primary point in the pericope is accurate self-perception in the context of Christian community. Paul’s particular emphasis on the body metaphor is similar in his letter to the Corinthians (12:12-31) where he urges the readers to consider the importance of unity within diversity. The background and social context in Rome add to the importance of the message Paul was carefully crafting as a part of his practical exhortation after a theologically dense diatribe. Paul wants the church in Rome to understand that while there may be many different roles each member may have, they are to be unified in thought and function as the body of Christ, rightly considering the equal faith and importance of each member. To illustrate his point Paul lists seven different gifts to help flesh out this concept: 1) prophecy, 2) service, 3) teaching, 4) exhortation, 5) giving, 6) leading, and 7) mercy. If one were to consider their gift or position greater than another, they would disregard the equity of the gospel they received and the value of another’s gift. Therefore, Paul is striving for accurate thinking in order to lead to accurate functioning.

III. AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

Scholarship is mixed on a consistent definition of authentic leadership (Yukl, 2013; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Yukl (2013) states that “Authentic leadership is based on psychology and psychological theories of self-regulation” (p. 351). While many theories vary “all emphasize the importance of consistency in a leader's words, actions and value” (Yukl, 2013, p. 351). Shamir and Eilam (2005) attempt to clarify the concept of consistency by describing four characteristics of an authentic leader: 1) they do not fake their leadership, 2) they do not take on a leadership role for status, honor, or personal reward, 3) they are originals, not copies, and 4) they are leaders whose actions are based on their values and convictions (pp. 396-397). A strong sense of personal awareness, emotional health, and the consistency of behaviors all reflect core competencies of an authentic leader. “In other words, they know who they are and what they believe” (Yukl, 2013, p. 351). When personal values and convictions are genuinely implemented by an authentic leader, followers often respond positively leading to a greater sense of well-being and meaningfulness (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005).

IV. ROMANS 12:3-8 AND AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

There are three main ways the exegetical findings of Romans 12:3-8 can inform authentic leadership. First, self-knowledge has a communal end. Paul is addressing individuals within a community when he is calling each person to individually consider how they view themselves. He is calling for self-reflection which leads to self-awareness. Self-awareness is a significant cornerstone of authentic leadership (Yukl, 2013). However, Paul's goal for self-awareness is not personal consistency, but rather healthy communal relationships. This nuance is important because it should refine the motive of an authentic Christian leader. In a sense, the value of consistency in authentic leadership is elevated by Paul to consistency with gospel living as a Christian (Romans 12:1-2).

Second, Paul's emphasis on unity within diversity can help to develop authentic leadership's increased emphasis on the self-determined efforts of a leader. Even when the goal is authentic followership, authentic leadership is still based on being true to self (Gardner et al., 2005, pp. 345-437). Romans 12:3-8 suggests that “being true to self” is recognizing the diversity of the larger body and the need each has for another. Paul's goal is to encourage the church toward healthy interdependence, where theories of authentic leadership make self-realization the goal, as articulated by Kernis (2003) when he says authenticity is, “the unobstructed operation of one's true, or core, self in one's daily enterprise” (p. 1).

Third, Romans 12:3-8 illustrates the value of each member of a team since each has been given a gift to use. Discovering, understanding, and utilizing that gift is important for the health and function of the broader community. There is an implicit suggestion that each person ought to be in the process of discovering their personal giftedness if they do not already know it, since the command is “let us use them” (12:6). Authentic leadership is built on this type of self-understanding. The authentic leader can benefit from Paul's focus on giftedness since it highlights the value of knowing self

and what a team may bring to the table. From a Biblical perspective, drawing on the giftedness of others is just as important as knowing one's own strengths.

V. IN SUMMARY

To conclude, Romans 12:3-8 provides significant insight into the process of increasing in self-awareness which is a foundational to authentic leadership. By following Osborne's (2006) method for exegetical research I considered the genre, purpose and occasion, historical background, literary structure, and the significant lexical-grammatical constructions of the pericope. The results helped to answer the question, "What does it mean to think of one's self accurately?" Thinking of self accurately means understanding self in the context of community, considering the need for being interconnected, and the value of giftedness as a role to play that doesn't lead to arrogance or self-pity. Paul reminds the church that the gospel was given to all and is a foundation for viewing self and each other accurately.

About the Author

Neal Anderson serves as the Director of Residence Life at Colorado Christian University outside of Denver, Colorado, where he lives with his wife and three boys. For the past decade Neal has worked in student affairs at Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College, where he earned his B.A. in Biblical Languages and M.A. in Biblical Exegesis. Neal is currently a Ph.D student in Organizational Leadership at Regent University in Virginia Beach.

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