

GIVE YOUR “ORDINARY” TO GOD

Romans 12

I love chapter 12. The opening is dramatic: “I appeal to you....” All the groundwork has been laid, and what follows in these final chapters is wonderful counsel, counsel that can now be given because Paul’s argument for God’s unconditional love—to both Jew and Gentile—has been completed. And this counsel being offered is important. Here is a paraphrase of verses 1-2:

So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

It comes from *The Message* and I particularly like it. “Take your everyday, ordinary life.... [F]ix your attention on God.... God brings the best out of you....”

I know we have been knee deep in theology, but as Paul so often does, without abandoning the theology, he gets practical. In

chapter 12 Paul challenges us to think about our relationships.⁷ John Stott presents as follows:

1. Our relationship to God: consecrating our bodies and renewing our minds
2. Our relationship to ourselves: thinking soberly about our gifts
3. Our relationship to one another: loving our family, i.e., the church
4. Our relationship to our enemies: love not retaliation

These relationships start with our union with God. Paul's theology is refreshingly honest. Becoming the people God calls us to be does not happen instantly, nor does it happen magically. It happens by us committing ourselves to God, and renewing our minds. If that sounds like work, it is because it is work.

The Gospel is God's offer of love to us, that is free, no work needed. The Christian Life is then the task of living into this love. We will of course not be perfect, and we should let people know that we are not perfect. Somehow the message of the church has become one of judging others when it should be one of running a race.

When I attended my first marathon (no, I was not running it), what struck me was the community. Here were several thousand people, turning out to either run 26.2 miles or encourage those who were. A few did it with style, but for most it was a real struggle, and for a few you might say, "it was not pretty." But you know what? Everybody was cheering everyone else on. No one, from what I could tell, was judging: everyone just wanted the others to finish.

⁷ Ibid. pp. 317-338. Stott uses these four headings to unpack chapter 12 of Romans.

These strangers all had a common bond, a common relationship, and therefore encouraged one another.

That is what the Christian Life and the Church is all about. We are free to be exactly this way because we are secure that God loves us. So, I urge you, I appeal to you, my brothers and sisters, to take your ordinary, everyday life, and offer it to God and love one another, encourage one another, to run the race. (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 9:24, 2 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 12:1).