



Introduction

Last week we discussed what happens when we live our lives after the pattern of this world. I am sure you remember the outcome of that kind of living. Simply put, we become focused on self because a self focus is the pattern of this world. With that understanding, it isn't any wonder that in this next verse, Paul talks about how we think of ourselves. So... let's go ahead and jump right in to taking a look at Romans 12:3 where Paul continues to urge us on in this pursuit of Godly living!

Looking at the Verse

I find great value in dissecting a verse, phrase by phrase so we will continue doing so for verse 3. Romans 12:3 is a very pointed instruction. I believe Paul knew he couldn't give this instruction without the grace of God being on his life. That is why he begins as he does. God's grace had literally transformed him and before he would make this bold statement he wanted to make this grace clear. Paul wasn't naïve. He knew that those who would read this statement knew of his past. You see before Paul became a follower of Jesus he was a man definitely cut from the same pattern of this world. He was focused on self. His self focus was cloaked in a religious fervor but that fervor had little to do with the living God and much to do with a man determined to promote himself among religious circles. But through God's grace, he had been changed. He was no longer conformed to the pattern of this world, totally focused on self. He had been set free and he had a burning desire to encourage others in this same way. In fact God had given him a responsibility of sharing that message with others. Take note here as well that this message is for every person and I believe it is for each of us too. And so, Romans 12:3 begins with these words:

"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you" (NIV)

"For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you" (NASV)

"Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning" (NLT)

"I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you" (Message)

So what is Paul's message that he has learned through grace. He says it in this way:

"do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment" (NIV)

"not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment" (NASV)

"don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves" (NLT)

"it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you" (Message)

Wow, that can be a very hard thing to hear. No one likes to be told that they are selfish and self-centered. Paul is clearly speaking about that here though. What was his motive? I believe it was grace. Paul had lived a very religious life that was focused on self. He knew how empty that could be. Because of that, he also knew that people who had a zeal for God could easily still be wrapped up in self. Paul loved these believers and he didn't want them to fall into the same trap he had fallen into. He knew how empty a self focus was. And so he gave these warnings. Let's look closer.

The NIV, NASV and KJV use the word "ought". That word poses lots of questions for me. As you have been memorizing this week, also aiming to live as God wants you to live, I imagine it may have raised some questions for you too. We all have the goal of keeping our mind on Christ, serving others, not being focused on self. However I know that as a person I have to think of myself at times. I have to consider myself to live. You do too. Paul obviously knows that too. It is the age old question of how much is too much? Where is the line, because I don't want to cross it! On the one hand I have the world telling me to "always consider myself, or take care of yourself because no one else will!" On the other end, I can also entertain a martyr attitude that says I should never

think of myself and try to display that in my Christian circles which in reality usually only puffs up my pride. Those are the two extremes. But then I read the word "ought". Obviously there is a point that I am supposed to think of myself. What is it? The Greek word for "ought" is the word "dei" and it means simply this – as necessary. So we could say it like this:

Don't think of yourself more highly than is necessary.

I can grab hold of that. It can become real and doable in my life. It helps me understand that God knows there are places where it is necessary to consider myself. That is freeing to me. I hope it is to you as well. But how do we do that in a way that doesn't get out of balance? Paul answers that by telling us how to think of ourselves. He says do it with "sober judgment, sound judgment, honest evaluation". What does that mean? The Greek word for "sound" or "sober" as used here is "*sophroneo*" and it means to be of sound mind, to be in one's right mind, to exercise self control. So as we do think of ourselves in necessary ways, Paul is urging us to do it with a clear head, not puffed up, but in moderate ways, based on rational thinking. To conclude, there is one more phrase we need to take note of:

"in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you" (NIV)

"as God has allotted to each a measure of faith" (NASV)

"measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us" (NLT)

"the only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him" (Message)

For memorizing purposes, the words of that last phrase may be challenging as they not our normal way of speaking, but I think it is more simple than it may sound. I want to take the liberty to paraphrase what Paul is saying in this last phrase like this:

"Look, hey, remember here, you are not of this world. God has given you faith. He has allowed you to see life from His perspective. Since your faith is real, live that way! Live in a way that you don't have to be like the world, grasping for attention, grasping for importance, puffed up, always on your own mind. The most important thing is that you know and believe you are important to God and that He loves you. Now that you have the faith to believe that, you are set free to live with your mind on all kinds of things other than yourself."

And So...

We must live in the world, but not be of it. The world will always have itself on its mind. It doesn't believe that anyone else cares enough to do so. But we through grace have been given a faith to know that a loving God has us on His mind. In fact the Bible says that *"His thoughts toward us outnumber the grains of sand"* (Psalm 139:17-18). Through grace, Paul was set free to a new way of thinking. He didn't figure it out on his own, God had to show Him. As believers God has shown us too. However, I must admit to you that even as I write this I struggle with this balance. I know that I consider myself way too often. Last night, I said, "God how can I put these thoughts on paper and send them out as I sit here and battle this very thing?" I also know from talking with many of you, you are familiar with the battle too. God directed my thoughts back to our verse from last week, Romans 12:2, reminding me that I am still being transformed as I renew my mind. And so... if you struggle, press on with me; be in the Word, allow God to renew your mind with His thoughts. Allow Him to keep showing you everyday. He has allotted us a measure of faith. May we live by it!

Consider:

How often are you on your mind?

What are the necessary places for you to consider yourself? Why?

Do you struggle with a self focus? How does it show itself in your actions and words?

Take some time to think about sober judgment in this area. Consider our thoughts about how God may want to set you free.

Pray

Romans 12:3, *Lord, help me to think of myself in accordance with the faith You have given me. Give me sound judgment concerning myself. Set me free from the pattern of this world so that my mind can focus on You, on the ways You want me to serve, on the wonders You want to show me and teach me. Transform me Lord!*