

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Summoned To Serve Together

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“I summon you, therefore, brothers *and sisters*, by the mercies of God, to stand your bodies alongside *as a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God -- your spiritual/rational service-of-worship.*”

Romans 12:1

This is a powerful, dramatic shift in Paul’s argument. Most of his letters can be divided into two parts: a doctrinal section, followed by a practical section. Romans 12:1 is where Paul begins to give voice to the logical ramifications of what he had presented in the first eleven chapters. His language is quite strong and direct. Compared to what most of us have considered or experienced of the church, or Christian commitment, Paul’s admonitions may sound quite foreign to our expectations, or what we are accustomed to. Compared to “church as we know it”, Paul’s vision is raw and unapologetic. **If you want to talk about “where the rubber meets the road”, ...it starts right here!**

As is often the case, **we tend to read this passage as an isolated text, lifted out from the preceding argument. Consequently, we miss the serious tone which chapters 9-11 created.** The main lesson of those chapters is about how *some* who had great revelation and blessing from God *had drifted away, and were cut off, ...while others* (most of *them*) who had little or no awareness of God *were given the opportunity to become part of the family of faith.* Paul had stated, **“Behold the kindness and severity of God: ...His kindness to those who *continue in His kindness, but His severity in cutting off those who fall away from loyalty to Him*”** (11:22). This had actually been a consistent theme of the entire letter. Remember, back in the first couple of chapters, how Paul had said that the wrath of God was revealed against the undevotedness of people toward God, and their unjust attitudes and behaviors toward others. They were people who suppressed the truth in unrighteousness (1:18). The ignorant Gentiles had done this (1:18-32), but so had the more “enlightened” moralists (2:1-16), or *even the Jews* (who actually *had* clear revelation from God – 2:17-24). As a result, ***all were condemned.*** All were under sin, and were not seeking God (3:9-11). **But God, in His mercy and grace, had revealed a righteousness which was *purchased and provided by Him through Jesus Christ, and was offered as a gift to anyone who would trust in Him.*** Throughout the letter, we see the vanity of human efforts at religion, or moral righteousness, set at contrast with the way of God’s grace and the righteousness which comes through faith. **Those who strive in the flesh are doomed to *rejection, frustration and spiritual death.* Those who live by faith, receiving the gift of righteousness through Christ, find *acceptance, freedom and life from the Spirit.***

Having laid all of this out, repeatedly, throughout the letter, ...especially culminating in the backdrop of God’s dealing with the Jews..., Paul turns his attention to practical matters.

“Therefore...” Whenever you see this, it is a STRONG logical connector, ...indicating that a conclusion is being drawn from what had gone before. Even though it is the second word in the Greek of this sentence, it would be perceived as primary. Many of our English translations put it first in the translation.

“I summon y’all...” The Greek word for “summon” here is literally, “I call alongside”. It is used in a wide variety of contexts. It can mean “I call on you for help”, ...“I invite you” to join me in something, ...or, “I call you aside to earnestly speak with, beg or implore you” about some matter, ...or “I call you aside to speak into your life by way of exhortation, encouragement or comfort.” So, until we know more about the context, a good basic translation would be “I call you to my side” or “I summon you”.

“brothers *and sisters*...” In the Greek, it is only “brothers”, but in that society this was commonly understood to mean “brothers and sisters”, unless the subject matter was clearly to only refer to males. Paul unashamedly taught the full equality and inclusion of women in Galatians 3:26-29, “For you are *all* sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For *all* of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are *all* one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.” Note that the “you are all” of verse 28 would imply that the females of that verse are also “sons of God” in verse 26. You say, “What?” Paul did not misspeak. He is saying that women have full legal status before God, and are full heirs of God, as if they were “sons of God”. Certainly, here in Romans 12, women are not to be *excluded* from Paul’s statement, but *included*.

“by the mercies of God...” The rationale for Paul’s appeal to them, ...the effective basis for his summoning them..., was the motivating emotion stirred up by recognizing the tender compassionate feelings which God has had for them, and for humanity in general. God is not a distant uninterested Deity who has no concern for us. No. He is VERY concerned about us. He has great compassion and empathy for us. Through Jesus Christ, He has revealed that

He has deep pity, mercy and consideration for us. He has revealed to us His compassionate concern by sending Jesus as a Savior to redeem us. In 2 Corinthians 1:3, Paul describes God as “the Father of mercies and God of all comforts.” **This realization that God is deeply concerned and empathetic toward us, ...and that His compassionate interest has been expressed in dramatic, sacrificial action on our behalf through Jesus Christ..., opens our hearts in response, and motivates us to reciprocate in some way, out of gratitude.**

“**to present your bodies...**” The Greek word for “present” is literally to “stand alongside”. It means to “line up, ready to serve.” It could mean that we stand alongside Him, ready to serve Him, ...or it could mean we line up next to each other for some purpose. The next phrase clarifies what Paul had in mind.

“**...a living sacrifice...**” Note that we are to come together, ...somehow to join together, or stand-alongside each other, ...in order to become a living dedicated offering to God. The word translated “sacrifice” can simply mean “offering” or “something dedicated to God”. Note that we-plural, ...we as a group of individuals..., are to come together to jointly-serve as a dedicated implement in God’s service. **Paul is summoning us, recruiting us, to serve together in some way. We are to each one stand ourselves at the ready to be a team, a functioning unit, a larger organism.** One very clear example of this in the Roman society of the first century was the Roman phalanx, a closely-knit formation of troops, moving together in unison to defeat the opposing forces. This would fulfill the language so well, in that *every soldier*, as well as *the entire battle formation* was operating as a living sacrifice. They were willing to lay down their lives in the service of their commanding officers. Each soldier was “**...holy...**”, i.e., dedicated and consecrated with entire devotion to their King. “**...well-pleasing to God...**” This term refers not to our status as redeemed ones. Instead, this term was predominately used for *evaluating the behavior of individuals*. It was used to describe the well-pleasing service of slaves to their king. The focus of this term is on our acceptable and commendable service rendered to God. It is interesting how we have turned this into an image of God’s attitude toward *us*, and have missed the normative meaning of the word. Paul is summoning us to join together as a devoted team, consecrated and committed to serve God in such a way that He will be well-pleased with our service.

“**...the reasonable/spiritual service-of-worship of y’all.**” It would seem that Paul found the perfect word to communicate what he intended to express. **The Greek word, “logikos”, has a double meaning** which perfectly suits Paul’s purpose, here. **First, it can mean “rational, reasonable”.** You can see that the word, “logical” in English is derived from this Greek word. This definition would emphasize the reasonableness of a response of obedience and sacrifice to the love and mercy God has shown toward us. He has gone to such great lengths to redeem us, and offers us His salvation freely. All He asks is that we trust Him and follow Him. We have no debt to repay for His sacrifice shown to us, except the debt of love and gratitude that naturally flows from a heart that truly understands what He has done for us. **Second, the word, “logikos”, can also refer to what belongs to the realm of the mind and the spirit, in contrast to the body or the flesh.** This definition emphasizes the service that springs from the inner self. It is not just the outward, physical service that Paul is summoning us to give. He is calling us to serve in the inner heart, ...our mind and spirit..., so that our actions are not merely outward ritual, but genuine expressions of the heart.

Note that we come back where the verse began: “Y’all”. We were all summoned to present our bodies to become a single living unit, ...a living sacrifice. **We are called to count the cost God paid**, and in response to *His* great mercy and the extent of *His* self-giving sacrifice, **choose to be willing to lay our lives down for Him as a committed team.**

Romans 12:1 is a recruitment call. Paul is summoning us to “step up”. THIS is the logical consequence of understanding what God has done for YOU! **How can you say you love God, and stay uninvolved?** God has a strategy for most effectively spreading the Kingdom of God on this planet, and it involves YOU! **God is calling out an army of workers. He has been calling out an army of workers for millennia, but, tragically, most people do not hear, or listen to, His summons.** Or, those who have been assigned to lead have not effectively understood the King’s strategy, and have not effectively trained the members of Christ’s team to understand or carry out their jobs. **We have failed miserably to develop the teamwork we read about in the New Testament.**

When Jesus introduced the Church in Matthew 16, He said, “I will build My church, and Hades’ gates will not be strong against it.” **The word for church is “ekklesia”, literally, “the called-out ones”.** Jesus was going to *call them out* of their spiritual blindness, and spiritual dullness. He was going to *call them out* of their natural, everyday lives, to live as active disciples. **Do you think Paul understood Jesus’ plan? Do you think Paul was given revelation for helping the called-out ones become a unit**, and to learn to *develop their teamwork*, so they could fulfill their Kingdom duty assignments? Well, I think it is no coincidence that just as Jesus referred to His Kingdom workers as “called-out-ones”, and here in Romans 12:1, **Paul is “calling-us-alongside” and exhorting us to “stand-our-bodies-alongside” one another** to become a “living-offering, dedicated to God, doing-well-pleasing-work”. **Paul is trying to form up the ranks, develop the units, form the teams.** Paul is summoning us to become the phalanx of God’s Kingdom.