

Commitment: Romans 1.8-17

Growing Community - Talk 2

Aim of the talk: to show that for a community to flourish it needs to be a community where members commit to one another, commit to the world, and commit to the gospel.

Introduction

Theme for this term

- The theme for this term is growing community – looking at the qualities of a healthy community which looks after one another and reaches out beyond itself.

Recap on last time

- At the last team night we looked at the introductory verses of Romans and the theme of Identity – how we should see ourselves in the light of what Jesus has done for us. This week we are going to be looking at the next section of Romans and the theme of commitment.

Importance of commitment

- Commitment is essential for all healthy relationships.
- Those who have a fear of commitment struggle in their relationships.
- The psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck, describes commitment as ‘the foundation, the bedrock of any genuinely loving relationship.’
- It is always a risk, but it is a vital element in loving one another.
- It is essential for marriage and is the content of the marriage vows at a wedding.
- Commitment is vital for parenting, and giving children the security they need to mature.
- It enables friendship to have real depth.

Maybe give an example of a friend who is committed to you and the difference that makes, or even compare with a friend who you know is not committed to you.

- Commitment creates trust, helps us take risks with one another, and enables us to overcome obstacles.
- Commitment is one of the key marks of the Christian community.
- The early Christians called each other ‘brothers and sisters’ referring to the fact that we are bound together permanently like members of a family.
- But his commitment to one another is not always easy or natural.

Paul’s commitments

- In his letter to the Romans Paul is attempting to overcome several obstacles and divisions.

- He is trying to overcome divisions between Jews and Gentiles in the church in Rome – two groups who have hated each other for many years and who thought each other immoral and uncivilised.
- He is trying to overcome the distance between the church in Rome and himself. Unlike the other churches he wrote to, Paul did not found the church in Rome, and so did not have automatic authority with them.
- Paul manages to overcome these obstacles by showing that he is committed to the church in Rome.
- And Paul's commitment to them is what gives him the authority to write this letter.
- In this letter he will go on to teach doctrine and ethics, what the Romans should believe and how they should behave, but he is not teaching them as someone who is an objective observer, analysing them from a distance.
- He is not a consultant giving them some advice; he is saying these things as someone who is deeply committed to them.
- In this passage we see five commitments that Paul makes and which lay the foundation for everything he is going to say.

Five commitments we need to make.

- And these are five vital commitments that we need to make if we are going to be a community that can overcome differences, deal with conflicts and disappointments, and form an effective and united community.

1. Commit to thank God for one another

- First, we need to commit to thank God for one another.

Paul thanks God for the Romans

- Paul has lots he wants to say to the Romans, because he thinks they have got things wrong in their belief and behaviour.
- But he starts, in verse 8, by thanking God for what they have done right.
- This is a vital way we can grow as a community.

Why we thank God for one another

- We thank God for one another because it is an amazing thing to have one another.

Think of an example of a way you have benefitted from people at St Peter's which you are grateful for.

Seeing the best in each other

- When we choose to thank God for one another it also prompts us to look for the best in each other and we see things we might ordinarily ignore.

Exercise/Illustration

Either give an example of when this has happened to you (i.e. when you have decided to thank God for someone and in doing so, have seen good in them that you hadn't seen before.) Or you could use this exercise:

Get everyone to close their eyes. Tell them that when they open their eyes you want them to look for a certain colour (e.g. red) which is in the room and try to remember all the red objects in the room. Get them to open their eyes for about 30 seconds and allow them to look around the room. Then get them to close their eyes and with their eyes still closed ask them to shout out what they saw that was red in the room. This should be quite easy. Then with everyone keeping their eyes closed ask them to shout out things that are a different colour (e.g. blue) in the room. This should be quite difficult.

- The lesson is (if this works) that we see what we are looking for: if we look for the worst in people we will see their faults, but if we choose to thank God for one another we start to see the best in them.
- When we thank God it forces us to pay attention to what God has given us.
- When we thank God for other people it forces us to look for the best in them.
- This is our first commitment to one another – to thank God for one another.

2. Commit to pray for one another

- Secondly we commit to pray for one another.
- Paul reminds the church in Rome that he is praying for them, constantly.
- Praying for one another, and with one another, achieves extraordinary things.

Transformation

- Praying for one another brings about change in us.
- Paul wants to teach the Romans lots of things, but he knows that the best way of seeing transformation in them is by praying for them.
- If we want to have an effect on one another, the most important thing we can do is pray for one another.

Intimacy

- Praying for one another also manages to break down barriers.
- It creates intimacy and closeness.
- It is one of the most essential elements of a successful marriage – praying together regularly.
- It creates a bond in our friendships.
- Even when you are praying for people on the other side of the world it makes you feel close to them.

Loving one another by praying for one another

- Praying for one another is one of the primary ways in which we love one another.
- Committing to pray for one another is an essential ingredient for forming long-term, healthy relationships.
- If we want to have an effect on one another, the best thing we can do is pray for one another.

3. Commit to learn from one another

- We commit to thank God for one another, we commit to pray for one another, and thirdly we commit to learn from one another.
- Verse 11 Paul says that he is longing to come and 'impart some spiritual gift to them' – in other words to go and give something to them. But then he checks himself, and remembers that it is not a one way thing. He corrects himself in verse 12 and says that he hopes that 'you and I may be *mutually encouraged* by each other's faith.'
- The most effective communities are those where everyone is learning from one another.

Both teaching and listening

- We commit both to teach one another and learn from one another.
- We are not to be a community where the leaders teach and the people listen.
- We are to be a community where everyone has something to contribute and everyone has something to learn.
- This is a challenge for everyone. Some people find it hard to listen, and have to grow in humility, in order to learn how to do this. Others find themselves afraid to speak up, and need to grow in courage.

Example of finding one or either of these difficult would fit well here.

- We need to be a community of mutual learners, humble enough to listen, and brave enough to speak.

4. Commit to the world

- We are to commit to thank God for one another, to pray for one another, and to learn from one another.

Inward commitments and outward commitments

- These are all inward commitments – commitments to each other within the community.
- However, Paul reminds us that there is also a commitment which is outward facing – a commitment to the world.
- In verse 14 he says, 'I am *bound* both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.'
- He is saying that he has a commitment to the Gentile world, of every type: of different races (Greek and non-Greek); and different levels of education (wise and foolish).
- The Christian community should never be primarily inward looking.
- We are community on a mission to the world – to make disciples of all nations.
- Of course we should look after one another, but our main focus is always towards those on the outside.

- This is why Alpha and Safehaven are such a priority at St Peter's – because they are two of the main ways that we focus on those outside the church, and why hospitality is such an important thing for us on Sundays, so that anyone coming from outside the church gets the best possible welcome and is made to feel immediately accepted for who they are.
- That's the fourth thing: commit to the world.

5. Commit to the gospel

- We need to be committed to thank God for one another, to pray for one another, to learn from one another, and be committed to the world. Finally, we need to be committed to the gospel.

The power of the gospel

- It is the gospel which gives power to our commitments.
- If we are committed to one another and to the world, but not to the gospel, we will not have anything of ultimate value to offer.
- Paul says, verse 16, that he is not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.
- It is the gospel that transforms our community from being a group of people who try to be nice to one another, and to those outside, into a community where things happen – where people are healed, inspired, transformed and made whole.

Being right with God

- It is a gospel in which 'the righteousness of God is revealed.' The 'righteousness of God' means the work in which God gets people right with him – puts his relationship with us back in order. Being righteous means being in right relationship with God.
- This is what we are offering to one another and to the world, the possibility of a right relationship with God which changes everything.
- When people know God they are changed.

Conclusion

God's commitment to us

- So the Christian community should be characterised by commitment: commitment to one another – to thank God for each other, to pray for one another, to learn from one another.
- It should be characterised by a commitment to the world – always looking outwards.
- And it should be characterised by a commitment to the gospel which has the power to transform lives and societies by putting people right with God.

- But in all these commitments we must remember that it all starts with God's commitment to us.
- God is a God who makes commitments.
- He promises never to leave us or forsake us.
- He binds himself to us forever, never giving up on us even when we give up on him.
- He is utterly committed to us forever, and this is what enables us to commit to others.