

# Role and Responsibility

## INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS

Why do people derive their sense of identity from the jobs that they have and the roles that they perform (for example being a mother)?

Why are some roles regarded as bringing greater status than others?

How do Christians derive their sense of identity from the roles that they have within the church or other Christian organisations?

## ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

### **(1) People derive their identity from their role and responsibilities**

One of the main sources of personal identity is the role that we have in society. The roles we have may be provided by the work that we do, or by unpaid functions that we perform, such as being a wife or mother, or a member of a voluntary organisation. The importance that we place on roles is demonstrated by the fact that we define ourselves by our jobs ('I am a .....') and that one of the first questions we ask people is 'What do you do?'

What are your roles and responsibilities?

How do these contribute to your personal sense of identity?

Do you think that the way that other people see you is affected by the roles you have?

### **(2) Difficulties arising because our sense of identity is derived from our roles and responsibilities.**

A number of problems arise from the fact that we derive our identity from our roles and responsibilities:

(a) Problems of self-esteem

Society places a value on the roles that we possess, which contributes to our sense of self worth. We may be proud, superior and successful if our role is regarded as conferring a high status. We may suffer a lack of self-esteem if our role is regarded as unimportant, and we may feel a failure.

(b) Changes in our role and responsibilities

If we have built our identity on our roles and responsibilities difficulties will inevitably arise when our roles or responsibilities change. Certain events in life may trigger an identity crisis because we have come to define ourselves by our role, eg:

- 1 stopping being a student
- 2 losing a job
- 3 being made redundant
- 4 stopping work to care for children or elderly relatives
- 5 being unable to work due to illness
- 6 retirement
- 7 seeing children leave home

### **(3) Role and Responsibility in Christian Perspective**

As Christians we should derive our identity primarily from who we are in Christ. This frees us from the need to derive our identity from our roles and responsibilities. The gospel brings a new perspective which liberates us from worldly thinking (Romans 12v1-3).

(a) Why do we work?

Christians do not work primarily to gain status, value and identity.

*Read: 2 Thessalonians 3v6-15; Ephesians 4v28; 1 Timothy 5v11-15*

What reasons does Paul give for Christians to work in these verses?

What dangers come from being idle?

(b) How should we view the work we do?

Christians should not value themselves by what they do. Christians are enabled to perform jobs that the world regards as having a low status because they know that they are 'sons of God' in Christ:

*Read: 1 Thessalonians 4v11; 1 Corinthians 7v20-24; Psalm 84v10*

How should the attitudes of Christians to work be different to the attitudes of the world?

(c) Resisting the temptation to define people by their role

The Christian community of the church must take steps to ensure that it does not simply practice the values of the world, defining and categorising people by their role. The church can take steps to affirm the value and dignity of work that is despised by society, for example by valuing those with jobs that do not have a high status, or those who are not working because they are caring for others. It should cause us to reflect carefully when the majority of Christians aspire to high status professional jobs. Christians speak of being 'called' to be doctors, lawyers, teachers etc, but rarely of being called to be dustmen, cleaners or shop assistants. There are very few Christian hairdressers, yet this might be thought to be a job that would provide excellent evangelistic opportunities!

## **ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN THE CHURCH**

### **(1) Transferring worldly attitudes to role and responsibility into the church**

Whilst Christians are meant to find their identity in Christ rather than in their roles, it is all too easy for worldly attitudes to roles and responsibilities to be transferred into the life of the church. Christians may seek to gain their identity in their roles and responsibilities in the church, whether they are leaders of the church, or of particular activities in the church. Different roles in the church are regarded as attracting a higher status than others.

In what ways are the attitudes of the world about roles and responsibilities carried into the life of the church?

## **(2) Christians should not seek to gain identity and status from their service in the church**

The New Testament warns Christians against the danger of seeking to gain their identity and status from their roles and responsibilities in the life of the church.

*Read: Matthew 23v1-12*

How did the Pharisees seek to gain status and identity in the Jewish community?

How should Christians behave differently in the church?

*Read: Luke 17v7-10*

Should those who have leadership responsibilities in the church expect to be honoured for what they do?

## **(3) Christians should ensure that they value those who seem to be less gifted**

The New Testament warns Christians against the dangers of valuing some people more highly than others because they have different gifts. Paul uses the image of the body to teach that Christians need each other, and that although they have different gifts (some of which are better able to build up the body than others) the church must take special steps to honour the less gifted.

*Read: 1 Corinthians 12v21-26*

How should Christians regard the weaker members of the body?

Why should they regard them in this way?

How can we ensure that we value the less gifted members of the body appropriately at City Church?