

# 2017 Christian

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[ 0 : 00 ] 11 starting at verse 33. Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has ever been his counsellor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever. Amen. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

[ 1 : 19 ] Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is. His good, pleasing and perfect will. Father, thank you for your word, for its truth.

Father, thank you for your word. And we humbly submit to that truth right now. Asking that your word would indeed shape us, shape our minds and our hearts, mould us and fashion us, so that we are people who follow not our own hearts' desires, but seek to do your will.

Father, we pray for Michael that he would know your spirit at work through him and your spirit amongst us, so that as we listen, we would indeed all be transformed and changed.

We pray this in your name. Amen. Well, happy new year to you all.

It's not too late to wish you a happy new year. But as I look around the congregation this morning, I see that there were one or two of you here this morning that were also in Middleton last week when I was preaching.

[ 3 : 11 ] So if you've heard this message before, is going to be underlined for you today. And if you didn't take notice of it last week, I pray that you'll take notice of it this week and that we'll all be blessed together as we consider God's word.

We're going to be looking at, in particular, Romans chapter 12 and verses 1 and 2. Last week I began, as I'm going to begin this week, what can we expect in 2017?

Well, we know certain things, don't we? Things that are very, very obvious and some things that were laid out a long time ago. We know that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ will continue to grow because no one ever ceases to be a member of the church of Christ, not even in death.

So we do know that the number, the no man can number, will continue to be made up during 2017.

We also know from Scripture that there will be wars and rumours of wars. We can expect that.

Nothing will change. And as a result, there will be refugees, there will be famines.

[ 4 : 35 ] And to sort it all out, we have Donald Trump becoming president in the States. What a great thing to look forward to.

Well, we also have the consequences of Brexit, what that will mean, and what it will mean for each one of us as individuals. Some of us, perhaps, will be sitting on a leaving cert, entering new jobs. Perhaps some of us will be made redundant. Some of us will get a better rise in our wages. Some of us might face bankruptcy.

Who knows? Some of us with good health through the coming year. Some may have sickness. Some may be getting married.

Some may be having children. All of these things will happen in the year that lies ahead. They're there for us. And we know that for us as believers there will be difficulties to encounter because we know, again from Scripture, that in this world there will be tribulation.

[ 5 : 46 ] But how are you and I to face the new year as Christians? How are we to go forward into the months that lie ahead? Well, we're to go forward as God's people, never forgetting for a moment that we are God's people, that we have been bought with a price and that price is the

precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I would urge you as you go through the year that lies ahead to view the coming year with a mind that is in tune with Romans chapter 12 and verses 1 and 2.

It's an opportunity for us to live as Christians before a watching world as those that are indeed living sacrifices.

And I want us to just look at these two verses under three headings. It's been emphasized already that we are a people that have received mercy.

And the Apostle Paul here makes his appeal to the believers at Rome and to us today to live our lives in the light of the mercy that we have received.

[ 7 : 14 ] You notice that verse 12, verse 1 of chapter 12 of Romans begins with a therefore. And as somebody has pointed out that it is there for a reason.

It is there to tell us that Paul has already brought before us the glories of the gospel. He breaks out an appeal of praise as he reflects on that gospel in verse 33 of the previous chapter.

But he's been expounding the gospel. He's been explaining what the gospel is. And saying that as a result of this gospel that they have received, that there is a therefore.

There are certain consequences. So if we have accepted the truth of the gospel this morning, we can no longer live to please self.

We must be a people that are ready to offer ourselves to God totally and utterly. Those who have received the revelation, that is the truth of the gospel, must always be ready to act upon it.

[ 8 : 42 ] We are saved to serve. Each one of us. The gospel is about the mercy that we have received from God.

Mercy comes from Him. Where do we hear about this mercy? We hear about it in the gospel.

If you go back to Romans chapter 1 and verse 1, Paul refers to it as the gospel of God. It comes from God.

He's the initiator of the gospel. Or, if you like, the architect of the gospel. The gospel is not something new.

It is something that was announced on the pages of the Old Testament. Whether God promised a Savior who would come into the world, His very own Son.

[ 9 : 46 ] The gospel of God tells us that God sent His Son into the world. Truly God. But born of a woman, of the tribe of David, truly man.

And through the death of this God-man, through His death and through His resurrection, salvation would come into the world.

Or to put it another way, God the Father would send His Son that mercy might be shown to you and I.

So notice our text again this morning. Therefore, says the apostle, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices.

Well, what is the mercy that you and I have been shown? What does the gospel of God tell us of this mercy? Well, we can't possibly go through all of Romans.

[ 10 : 58 ] Every page tells us something of the mercy of God. But let me highlight just one or two ways in which God has been merciful to you and to I and myself.

He has shown mercy to us as sinners. The overriding truth is that God has been merciful to you and to me.

That's the very heart of the gospel. Each of us here this morning was born in sin. Each of us was under the wrath of God.

The apostle Paul tells us that in Romans 1 and verse 18. And he continues right through to chapter 3 and verse 20 to show that man, whether he's Jew or whether he's Gentile, is under the wrath of an almighty God.

All of us left to ourselves would end up in a lost eternity in a place called hell. Paul reaches a conclusion in chapter 3 and verse 10 that there is none righteous, not even one.

[ 12 : 18 ] one. You see, each one of us are steeped in sin, naturally speaking. But God has shown mercy to us.

And so if we're Christians this morning, it is because God has shown mercy to you and to me. As sinners, we have been saved by the grace of God.

God. Now let's remember who is writing this particular letter. It is not just any person. This is the apostle of God.

This is one who was chosen by God to bring us God's truth. And he's writing from a perspective not only of us as an apostle bringing the truth of God to us, he's writing this letter as one who has himself been shown mercy.

We know something of the story of the apostle, of course, how he was on the road to Damascus, how he was ready to put Christians in prison, and earlier he had been present and had raised his hand when Stephen was on trial for his very life, that Stephen should be stoned to death.

[13:39] Yes, said this man, he should be put to death. And he looked after the coats of those who had thrown stones at Stephen. But God showed mercy to him.

We read about it in 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verses 12 to 14. This is what he says, I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has given me strength that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

The grace of the Lord was poured out on me abundantly along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Paul says, I was shown mercy and every Christian has been shown mercy. Therefore, I urge you in the light of this to be living sacrifices.

[14:53] But not only does the Apostle Paul tell us about mercy shown to sinners, he shows us that this mercy makes every believer righteous in the sight of God.

He writes in chapter 1 of Romans in verse 17, he says, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. And he speaks more profoundly and in more fullness in chapter 3, verses 21 to chapter 4.

And what does he tell us in this particular chapter? He tells us of the Lord Jesus Christ as a substitute for sinners.

He speaks of the perfect one going to the cross of Calvary. And he speaks about the wrath of God being poured out upon him.

He says this, God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement. A better word there is propitiation.

[16:06] I know it's a longer word, but it expresses precisely what is happening here. That the Lord Jesus was the one who turned aside the wrath of God that was deserved by people like you and I.

And so the Lord Jesus hangs on the cross at Calvary. the anger of God is poured out against him.

And he cries as his anger is poured out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And if you're a Christian this morning, you have looked to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Saviour for your sins.

You have looked upon him as your substitute, as the only one who could remove the wrath of God from you. But the moment you look to the Lord Jesus Christ, something wonderful happened.

Not only was your sin completely removed from you because the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin, but the moment you look to Christ, the perfect righteousness of Christ was put to your account.

[17:30] You were counted righteous in the sight of God. What mercy that sinners such as ourselves could have upon their very own selves the very righteousness of Christ.

But that's what happened. That's mercy. mercy. And in the light of that, therefore, I urge you to present yourselves as living sacrifices.

Mercy also tells us that we are united with Christ. And being united with Christ, we are set free from bondage to sin.

Every believer has been given a resurrection life. And in chapter 6 of Romans, Paul speaks about our union with Christ.

In those early verses of the chapter, verses 1 to 3, he says we're united with Christ. When Christ died, you died in Him.

[18:40] You were buried with Him. And then you rose again in Him. We are in Christ, united in His death and in His resurrection.

And because we are united with Christ in His death and resurrection, we're told in Romans 6 and verse 11 that we can count ourselves dead to sin.

but alive to God in Christ Jesus. What mercy! What grace! Therefore, I urge you to give your lives entirely to Him.

We sang it earlier, didn't we? Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night, then I diffused a quickening ray.

I woke the dungeons flamed with light. My chains fell off. My heart was free. I rose, went forth and followed thee.

[ 19 : 52 ] This was Wesley's experience. And it is the experience of every Christian because he has been shown mercy.

Therefore, I urge you. There's more. it's a mercy that makes you and I sons and daughters of God. That's what Paul says in Romans 8. Every Christian is a child of God through the work of God the Holy Spirit.

In verse 15 of Romans 8, he said, it is by the Spirit that we can cry Abba Father. And because of this relationship that we have as a son and daughter of God, we are part of the very family of God. And being part of the family of God, the Apostle tells us in verse 38 of chapter 8, that nothing, but nothing, can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[ 21 : 04 ] What mercy has been shown to you and to me? Therefore, I urge you to present yourselves.

One more thing. Here is a mercy that was planned in eternity. Paul allows us a glimpse, if you like, behind the scenes.

he allows us to see something of God's eternal plan. And he tells us in chapter 9 and verse 15, that God is sovereign.

I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. And I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

He tells us he chose a worm like Jacob. He foreloved him. He elected him. Before Jacob had done good or evil, God set his love upon him.

[ 22 : 09 ] And this is true, not just of Jacob, it's true of every Christian here this morning. If you're a Christian, if you ever ask the question, why me?

they're members of my family who are not Christians, why did God love me? I was living like they were.

Why did God love me? Well, he loved you because he chose to love you. And we love God only because he first loved us.

Therefore, I urge you, in the light that you have been shown mercy, to offer yourselves as living sacrifices unto God.

That God has saved you, a sinner, in view of his sacrifice for your sin, in view of the fact that you have been made righteous with the righteousness of Christ, in view of your union with Christ, setting you free from the bond of sin, in view of the fact that nothing can separate you from the love of God as his child, in view of his eternal love, and we could go further to think of his daily mercies, his keeping mercies.

[ 23 : 35 ] Therefore, offer your bodies as living sacrifices. In view of such mercy, then, you are asked to show yourselves as sacrifices.

So, our second point is this, that the sacrifice is expected of each believer here this morning. And it's on the basis of God's mercy that Paul makes his appeal.

Therefore, for this reason, I urge every Christian, brothers, sisters, old, young, to live your life wholeheartedly for God.

Now, I would suggest that here in the West, we know very little of sacrifice. sacrifice. The greatest sacrifice we might make is getting out of our warm beds on a Sunday morning when it's cold outside.

We know very little of sacrifice. Others, as we shall discover in a moment, know a great deal more than we do. But on the basis of God's mercy, we should all be ready to make the ultimate sacrifice.

[ 25 : 05 ] And it should be a thank-offering sacrifice. That's the kind of sacrifice that is being asked of here. In the Old Testament, of course, an animal was killed.

People offered a sacrifice. And it looked forward to the ultimate sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. But the Old Testament also had another kind of sacrifice.

Although an animal died, it was referred to as a thanksgiving sacrifice. It was part of a mercy sacrifice, a way in which you offered your love to the Lord.

It was something very personal, a peace offering to God, if you like. like. And we have it referred to in Psalm 116 and verse 1, where the apostle, where the psalmist says, I love the Lord, for he heard my voice, he heard my cry for mercy.

And he goes on in that particular psalm to say how the Lord has shown mercy to him. The Lord has delivered him from his enemies, etc.

[ 26 : 30 ] What can he do then in response to God's loving kindness? What can he give as an offering to God for his tender mercies?

And he tells us in verse 17 of Psalm 116, he says, I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the Lord.

He didn't have to, but he wanted to show his love for the Lord who had been merciful, who had been kind to him.

I will offer you the sacrifice of praise, a thank offering to you for what you have done for me.

And that's what the Lord requires of you and I. It is a glad and willing sacrifice to him, a living sacrifice.

[ 27 : 33 ] But it is a sacrifice. Now we all make sacrifices. What do we make sacrifices for? Well, we perhaps make sacrifices for ourselves.

We make sacrifices for our family. we make sacrifices to put more money in the bank, perhaps, to have more power to gain material things, to get ourselves a bigger or better house or promotion. We can make sacrifices to promote our own ego. A boy makes a sacrifice for his girlfriend and vice versa.

But what about this living sacrifice for the one who has shown us such mercy? Do we make a sacrifice as far as our income is concerned?

Will we bring our tithes and our offerings to him gladly and willingly? How about our service to others?

[ 28 : 49 ] Are we ready to go the extra mile? Do we stay quiet in our places of work because we're unwilling to make the sacrifice that people might laugh at us if we speak of a saviour who died to save us from our sin?

How about the sacrifice of being ready and willing to lay down our lives for the Lord Jesus? How about the sacrifice if we are called into missionary work?

Are we ready to give up the comforts of home for him who loved us and gave himself for us? Are we ready to hear the command of the Lord Jesus Christ himself?

He's not speaking just of an occasional Christian or a special kind of Christian. He's speaking to every believer.

And he says in Romans 9 and verse 23 these words. He said to them all, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

[ 30 : 16 ] For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit his very self?

To take up our cross. cross. That means being ready to suffer. It's being ready to sacrifice.

And Jesus says, if you would follow me, this is what is required of me. there was a man who was a missionary, Jim Elliott, who was actually martyred out in the jungle.

And he said this, he is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose. Sacrifice. I picked up the evangelicals now when I was in Belfast. I want to read just a few lines.

[ 31 : 35 ] It's entitled Ethiopia, Christian girls singing in prison. Three teenage Christian girls.

One 15, one 14, and another 14, together with an older girl, were sentenced to prison for distributing Christian literature.

One of them was beaten in prison. And this is what we read at the end of the article. Eden suffered a beating on her first night in prison.

And then we have their own words. This suffering, they said, is an honour for us. We should expect persecution.

We are not afraid. We are singing and praying here in prison. Eden said, it is an honour to be jailed for God's kingdom.

[ 32 : 45 ] sacrifice. The presentation of our whole selves. Our minds.

We will have more to say about that in a moment. We can fill our minds with rubbish. Or we can fill our minds with that which is good and offer it up to God.

Our eyes and our ears, what do we see? What occupies our hearing? Can we offer our eyes and our ears as a spiritual act of worship?

How about our tongues? Only a little member we are told by James. It's a fire. Who can tame it?

But we can offer what we say to God and we can pray for that sanctification of our tongues, that we

will use our tongues to be witnesses in the world in which we live, in pointing our fellow men to the one who has shown us mercy.

How are we using our hands and our feet? Are we working with our hands to the glory of God? And are our feet being used to bring the gospel of peace to those out there who have no peace?

[ 34 : 11 ] the apostle Paul, again, writing to the Romans in chapter 6 and verses 14 to 16 says these words, or verse 12 rather, sin shall not be your master, because you are not able to obey its desires.

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness, for sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace, to offer ourselves utterly and completely, the whole of ourselves, which is our spiritual act of worship.

It is holy and pleasing to God, or as the authorised version has it, it's our reasonable service. service. In other words, to give ourselves wholeheartedly to God is the most logical thing we could ever do.

It's the most rational. If our minds have embraced what God has done, what can we do in return? Well, logic would surely say, take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.

Take myself and I will be ever only for my king. Living sacrifices in the light of God's mercies, offer yourselves as living sacrifices.

[ 36 : 13 ] And our final heading this morning is that we enter 1917 as those whose minds are being changed. See again Romans chapter 12 and verses verse 2.

Here the apostle Paul makes it very clear. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will. Be ready to be different.

That's what the apostle Paul is saying. To be those living sacrifices that will be noticed by others. J.B.

Phillips in his translation of this verse, the early part of it says, don't be squeezed into the world's mould.

[ 37 : 21 ] Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world. There's a thinking out there, and the thinking out there would press you into its mould.

We're living in a secular world, and it's not easy to run our lives contrary to that world. But we are to be different.

The world out there will say everybody is behaving in a particular way. Why shouldn't I? Why should I be different? Young people are saying, I'm sleeping with my girlfriend, my boyfriend.

What does it matter? You have your opinion, I have mine. No absolutes. It's okay, because everybody is doing it, and I'm not hurting anybody, and I love, and sad to say, I've even heard people saying, I prayed about it.

Don't be conformed to this world. My friends, be different. Be different to the world around you.

[ 38 : 42 ] You will be under pressure to conform to this world. Young people will. Fathers will. Mothers will.

And it doesn't stop when you get old. We'll be bombarded today, and we'll be bombarded tomorrow and the next day, throughout 2017, to be conformed.

But don't be conformed to this world. Be transformed. Maybe you are being squeezed at this particular moment to compromise your Christian faith.

And maybe some of you are continuing in your unchristian ways. And I ask you, and challenge you this morning, is it making you happy?

Are you contented? Mark this, there's so many people that have gone the world's way, and their lives have ended up messed up.

[ 39 : 52 ] Messed up. The world will look at you. It will embrace you, and you go along with it, and it will destroy you, and it won't take a blind bit of notice.

That's the reality. Be different. Have a mind that is conformed to the truth of God's word.

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. When the Lord Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration, we're told he was transformed before them.

It's exactly the same word. It's metamorphosis. It's the same thing that happens to a caterpillar when it turns into a butterfly.

A metamorphosis. A complete change. Something that is absolutely different. The Apostle Paul knew about this.

[ 40 : 56 ] He says, we have the mind of Christ. We have the mind of Christ. Now, how can you and I have the mind of Christ?

Only by our minds being changed. It begins when we're born again of the Holy Spirit. And it continues through our lifetime till that day that we're presented absolutely perfect in Christ. And it will happen. But there's this process whereby we are transformed into His likeness. It begins, it will have a conclusion.

But how will it happen? It will happen through God's providence. He will send us through difficult times, hard times, in order that the dross in us will be refined.

I remember a word of personal testimony here. As a young pastor, being asked to involve myself with some folks in England, it would give me a little bit extra money.

[ 42 : 12 ] It wasn't particularly Christian work, it wasn't non-Christian in that sense. But I thought whether it would give me some extra money. But I shouldn't have been involved and I listened and it ended up as a disaster.

It was the greatest thing that ever happened to me. It taught me so much. God took me through that in order that certain dross in me might be removed.

And He constantly does that in our lives through His providence and sending difficulties into our lives.

But God also works through His Word. Sanctify them says the Lord Jesus through your truth. Your Word is truth.

So read this Word, study this Word, listen to this Word and it is proclaimed week by week. so that your mind might be informed, that you will recognize that God is speaking to you through His Word.

[ 43 : 24 ] That God is speaking to you through the Word made flesh, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So that your minds are informed and the Spirit Himself impresses that Word upon your mind so that your minds are made more like unto the mind of God, that you will be holy as He is holy.

Do you find yourself at times disagreeing with God's Word? No doubt you do. I can't believe that or surely that's not true.

My friends, it's not this that is at fault. It is your mind that's at fault. let this Word transform you and don't let it match your thinking.

Rather, let hate influence your thinking so that your mind is informed. And all this will have the result that your mind will be changed and you will be able under God's goodness to test and approve what God's will is.

His good pleasing and perfect will. God isn't putting you into a situation that is hard and difficult.

[ 44 : 53 ] He's putting you into a situation where gladly and willingly you see that His ways are best. If it's good for Him, it's going to be good for you.

If it's pleasing to Him, it's going to be pleasing to you. Paul is arguing, yes, you've received mercy. In the light of that mercy, offer yourselves. And as you offer yourselves, pray that your mind might be changed. And that's how to live through 2017.

May the Lord help us, each one, to be the Christians that we all ought to be. To His praise and glory. Amen.