

Spiritual worship and the community of Christ

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[0 : 00] open in front of you. And I would like us to think about community. Community is quite a buzzword.

It has been for at least a decade. If you're asking for money from the government, if you put the word community in your application, you're much more likely to get the money.

And of course the current cliché is something which is a vibrant community hub. Not quite sure what that means, but lots of things are it. It's something that's valued.

People value something to do with community, particularly if you can put the word vibrant to it, or indeed the word hub. And it's considered desirable. And the world is looking for something like a vibrant community hub.

Now the gospel of Jesus Christ aims to produce, well not those words, but something very like it. Something which is beautiful and active.

[1 : 01] It doesn't use the word hub. The Bible uses the word church or churches. And if you like, you could extend that to saying a church family.

The gospel aims to produce beautiful and active churches, which live and work together as a church family. Now let's just go back to the world, because although the world values community, it doesn't really know how to produce it.

Despite commendable attempts. So let's not be cynical about it. The world tries very hard, but it... It... It...

It... It's community, but... They don't always work. The world doesn't know how to do it, but the church does.

The church has sometimes failed too. But the church is meant to do better, and can do better, and does do better, because the church is the one institution on earth that by the help and the grace of God can produce what all human beings long for, true, beautiful, active community.

[2 : 19] And that's what Paul's talking about as he moves from Romans 9, 10, 11 into Romans 12. And that's what we're going to look at this morning.

And I have to say, I think this is one of the most important pieces of Scripture in the New Testament. I think it's so important, and we'll do our best to look at it sort of just...

There's a... We certainly won't exhaust this. So my aim sentence, you see I have learnt something from that conference, is think spiritually, serve actively.

And by the time we get to the end, I would like... I would like to have given you reasons to think spiritually and to serve actively. And I've got three sections.

Number one, mind. Number two, body. Number three, actions. Following the paragraphs of Romans 12. So let's look, first of all, at mind.

[3 : 25] So Romans 12 says, Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your spiritual or reasonable act of worship. 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. For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment.

And my first point is mind, because there's a lot there about thinking and about attitude. So we have this word spiritual in verse one, which is *logikos*, which is quite, although it's translated spiritual, if you saw the word *logikos*, you would think, oh, that must be Greek for logical.

I think there is something there about thinking. It's a reasonable response. And then in verse two, you will have noticed, it talks about the renewing of your mind.

[4 : 50] And then in verse three, it talks about the way you think of yourself. Think with sober judgment. So let's look first of all then at the mind. And so my first point about this is that he is saying that the attitude of mind which we have first is to be a mental appreciation that we are saved by grace and by mercy and by compassion.

Now, you see, the world can't begin at this point because it's got no idea about this. But this is where Christian thinking starts. So that's why he begins his chapter.

I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices. The first thing is to appreciate God's mercy.

He talks about the compassions of God or the mercy of God. And I would like to refer us back just to see how much he's said about mercy.

So in chapter 11, verse 32, just a few verses earlier, he had said that God's way of salvation as he developed his plan through history made absolutely sure that everybody was in the position that they needed mercy, that no racial group could say, oh, well, they need mercy, but we don't.

[6 : 27] We're okay. And he focused this particularly on the Jews. 11, verse 32, God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

The Gentiles, who were ignorant and rebellious anyway, they need mercy. And the Jews, who were privileged and the elite and knew what was what, well, they made this hideous mistake of rejecting the Messiah, so they're disobedient and they need mercy.

So you see, he says, that's the situation we're all in. If anybody is going to be saved, they need to be saved by mercy. And then look at chapter 9, verse 14, which goes right back in his argument.

And he says, how does it all work? What is God's policy? Well, he quotes what God says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

He says, that's the way it all works. There isn't a single person who can say to God, well, I'm going to be saved because I deserve it and I've worked so hard and I've done so well.

[7 : 47] It's all mercy. God has compassion on whom he has compassion. You can't have it both ways. If you're going to be saved by grace, it's got to be compassion and it's got to come from God.

So my first question is, have you got this settled in your own mind? As you come to God, are you thinking to yourself, thank you, Lord, for having mercy on me?

Because insofar as we're thinking, well, actually, I haven't done too badly. I've lived the Christian life pretty well. If we're thinking it in that sort of way, then we'll forget mercy and we will completely miss out on the attitude, the vital attitude, that the whole church thing is built on.

Salvation does not have its roots in my achievements, my personal qualities, not even my gifts and talents, but God's mercy. So I ask you, first of all, whether you are agreeing with that, whether in your mind you've got that quite clear.

It's by grace, by mercy. Sometimes I'm not as grateful as I should be, but I should be grateful and I've got so much to be grateful for. If you had been to the doctor and the doctor had diagnosed you with something relatively trivial, you know, I don't know, think of something relatively trivial, you would take the medicine and you say, well, that was good, that sorted itself out, and you wouldn't be particularly grateful, but if you'd been to the doctor and he'd said, hang on a minute, you've got a terminal illness, we need to rush you to hospital straight away and you'd been rushed to hospital and they performed some drastic surgery and saved your life, you'd be grateful.

[9 : 53] Salvation is not just a sticking plaster on some relatively minor problem in our lives, it's life and death. That's what Jesus Christ achieved.

So let's come on now to the mental attitude of gratitude. In view of God's mercy, he puts together some words normally are to do with the temple.

So the word of, well, offering a sacrifice, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, and the idea of something which is pleasing, which is there in verse 2, his good, pleasing, and perfect will, and you have it in verse 1, pleasing to God, and then in verse 1 the idea of worship.

He says, if you are grateful, then the deep response is, thank you so much, Lord, what can I do but to offer myself to you without reservation.

All that I am, all that I have, Lord Jesus, I give it to you. And he says, that's where it all, that's the attitude of gratitude that is absolutely essential to everything that happens afterwards.

[11 : 25] I was thinking of the woman, there's a woman in the gospel story who wept and wiped Jesus' feet with her hair and poured expensive ointment on him and everybody thought, what a

weird woman, you know, what's she doing this for?

And Jesus saw that this extraordinarily generous, lavish, outpouring of gratitude and thankfulness and expense was because she knew she'd been forgiven a lot and Jesus said she loved much because she'd been forgiven much and I think that's, she would agree with what Paul writes at the beginning here.

She would say, I certainly want to offer my whole self as a living sacrifice, please, holy and pleasing to God. What else can I do? This is the worship I offer to God and whether you say it's spiritual or reasonable or logical, whatever way she says, well that's, you know, however you analyse it, that's what I want to do.

And I ask ourselves whether we have understood the same mental attitude. we've been forgiven so much, we've had a life or death intervention by God's grace.

What can we do apart from say, Lord, I'm yours totally. I might not think of myself to have very much to offer but whatever I have to offer I offer it to you.

[13:11] And I would ask you whether you would say yes to that, whether you'd be prepared to repeat that, whether you'd be prepared to pray that even as we're sitting together just now.

And then, thirdly, to do with the mental attitude, this mental attitude reshapes us afresh from the inside.

So he moves on, you see, in verse 2, don't be conformed, do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

So he does some interesting things in the original language. Don't be squeezed into the mould that the world tries to squeeze you into but instead be formed into another shape, be morphed, if you like, into another shape by the renewing of your mind.

See how important the mind is here, what we allow ourselves to think, what we tell ourselves to think. And he says that, well, it gives a rather beautiful picture, doesn't it?

[14:27] The world with its mould and the way it tries to shape our minds is characterised by ingratitude and aggression and competitiveness and pride and self and that forms a mind in a certain way but he says don't let the world form your mind that way but have your mind transformed and renewed.

So we're thinking of attitudes like humility where a Christian can't possibly look down on other people and say I'm so much better than you are because a Christian knows that he or she has been saved as John Copley used to say from the guttermost to the uttermost.

Christians don't have reason to be always complaining and rebelling against God but always to be grateful and Christians have a mind which is able to think well there but for the grace of God go I which gives compassion and Christians have a mind which is not resentful of God and angry with God but willing and obedient and he says this is your mind these are the things that shape your mind and he goes on to say that if this is happening then you find that you are able to test and approve what God's will is his good pleasing and perfect will and just to put that quite briefly there are things to seek things to desire things that are the way forward and what he's saying is that God has his priority of things to seek and God has his priority of things that are desirable and God has his ideas if you like of the way ahead and if your mind is being shaped as we've just been describing that you will find that what you think about this will begin to coincide with what God thinks about it then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good pleasing and perfect will I think that's a big sentence it's saying that the shape of life that's ahead the decisions and choices and situations God has you will begin to find that you can approach them and say well I can see there's God's will in this I can see which is God's way forward in this I can see what's desirable in this and you will test and approve God's will so that was my first heading on mind let's go to the second heading which is body number one mind attitude number two body I don't mean your body I mean us as a body the corporate living of the Christian now the art of driving a car as you may or may not realise is not in fact going as fast as you want anywhere you want the art of driving a car is being aware of the people around you so there are people in front that you're not supposed to attempt to drive through there are people behind who might be taken by surprise if you suddenly veer off course there are people on either side who are expecting you to do certain things but not to do other things and the art of driving is being aware of the people around you and so too the beauty of living the

Christian life is not just doing your own thing but coordinating and cooperating and fitting in and blessing other people Christian life is not meant to be lived in isolation but in community let's see

what he says verse 3 for by the grace given me I say to every one of you do not think of yourself more highly than you ought but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you just as each of us has one body with many members these members do not all have the same function so in Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others we have different gifts according to the grace given us and you see what he's saying there he's saying that like a human body is one thing one person with different parts of the body hands feet liver pancreas brain ears big toe etc they're all different very different aren't they but they all work together he says that's how it is in the Christian church so verse four just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function so in

[19 : 55] Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others and I hope you can see the significance of that thought it's quite a radical powerful thought so three words number one totality there are no exceptions to this he doesn't say well of course in the Christian life many of us form the Christian body many of us form the body of Christ but not all of us he doesn't make any exceptions like that does he he says so in Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others there aren't exceptions and I want to put a challenge in your mind if you have always been thinking well I'm a bit of an exception

I always think it's a dangerous thinking when people say well I can't I'm not like other people I'm a bit of an exception I get there are exceptional circumstances but what Paul is saying here well if you're a Christian this includes you as much as it includes any other Christian you are a member of the body of Christ you belong to all the other Christians and they all belong to you and you so if you're thinking yeah well it's alright for that lot but I'm a bit different then stop thinking that stop thinking it how dare you think that the Bible says we are all in this together we all belong each member belongs to all the others so number one totality number two unity there is one body with many members so he is talking about a unity a togetherness he hasn't allowed any Christians to opt out of it this doesn't apply to me and he doesn't set aside different sections and say well we'll do this in young adults but we won't think of all the whole church he says no it's all together there is a unity of the church and there is a diversity he says the the marvellous thing about this is we're all different but that's what brings us all together like the parts of the body they all do different things but they all work together and he says in verse four just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function so in Christ we who are many form one body and verse six we have different gifts so notice then what he's saying about differences he actually includes himself in this in verse three he says by the grace given me I say to this to you I've been given the particular unusual gift of being an apostle so that's what I'm supposed to do and that's what I'm going to do by speaking to you in the following way and he he talks about the proportion of faith which I think is the same way sorry is a different way of saying the same thing verse three think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you I think he's saying the same thing you've been given different gifts or different grace or different faith so where God has put you that's where you're supposed to be operating and this it seems to me is why he says in verse three do not think of yourself more highly than you ought but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you think of yourself with sober judgment which excludes at least two things the thinking of yourself too highly so you think well it all depends on me

I'm the only one in this church who ever does anything if I didn't do stuff then it would all fall apart he says well don't think of yourself more highly than you ought because we've all got gifts and you're supposed to have sober judgment about that on the other hand he also seems to me is offering a measure of rebuke really to people who say well I'm no use I can't do anything in the church I'm just a complete spare part and he say no that's not sober judgment that would be to contradict the whole idea of all the church belonging together we belong together and every part every member has a part to play it's just a question of finding what it is so rather than thinking it all depends on me or rather than thinking I'm no use we should be thinking something like this

[25 : 41] I'm a sinner I've been saved by Jesus Christ I can't do anything as well as Jesus deserves but I do some things for him of my ability and if he would like me to do that then I'm more than willing to chip in my contribution and that's what he's about the life of the church think of yourself with sober judgment can I say that this is the opposite of consumerism consumerism in the way I'm meaning it is like when you go shopping and you go to this shop and you say oh such and

such is on offer I like that I'll have some of those buy one get one free and then the next week it's not doing that and you think well in that case I'll go to another shop and oh they've got these on offer and that's what consumers do that's what consumers are supposed to do they're supposed to find what suits them and the idea of being loyal to any particular brand isn't really expected these days but church isn't like that church isn't consumerism church isn't well I'll try this church and the music's really good oh they've changed the band well I'll go to this church now and I really feel good about this church oh it's all changed well I'll go to this church now that's consumerism and Paul isn't giving an inch to that is he he's saying we all fit together think of yourself with sober judgment and play your part so that was body thinking body and thirdly and lastly action so we've gone from mind which is our attitude and thinking body which is everybody

I know we have different slots that we can fit in different times in the week when we can do different things but all comes under the heading of the whole body and now we move to action so Paul gives some examples of action he says verse 6 we all have different gifts according to the grace given us if a man's gift is prophesying let him use it in proportion to his faith if it is serving let him serve if it is teaching let him teach if it is encouraging let him encourage if it is contributing to the needs of others let him give generously if it is leadership let him govern diligently if it is showing mercy let him do it cheerfully so I've got some thoughts about that list of actions so number one notice that he's got two ways of saying the same thing sometimes he talks about gift sometimes he talks about function they're just two ways of saying the same thing aren't they what function does this part of the body have what function does this person play it's the same thing as saying what gift does this person have we have different gifts we have different functions same two ways of saying the same thing number two this list of gifts or functions or activities is not a complete list not a complete list so if doing church cleaning isn't on that list doesn't mean that that isn't a spiritual gift if putting up the hymn numbers isn't on the list doesn't mean that that isn't a proper contribution etc etc there are other lists of gifts in

Ephesians and 1 Corinthians and even then I don't think he's exhausting the lists he's just giving examples of different ways that people can act and be useful in the church and in real life there's a flexibility about it which Paul doesn't stop to explain but I think as we experience teaches us that people can have overlapping gifts and a gift can expand and contract and fit in in a certain situation and maybe fit in less in another situation and so on number three he is describing the way the church or the community or the body of Christ operates sometimes it used to be said that if you weren't a charismatic church you didn't believe in spiritual gifts that's silly no church can operate without gifts without gifts of

God without gifts of the spirit no church can operate without them and that's exactly what Paul is describing here so if you are unsure about it we believe in the gifts of the spirit we need the gifts that the spirit gives we can't operate any other way point number four most of the gifts if not all the gifts that he describes here are fairly ordinary abilities or human abilities put into the hands of God God so as a particular example the person whose gift is contributing to the needs of others let him give generously well let's assume that's financial that is really a product of what sort of job they've got or what money they've inherited it's a very ordinary human thing but it's put into the hands of God most of these gifts if not all of them are ordinary human abilities in the hands of God serving for example contributing to the needs of others

I know that when people talk about gifts they get a bit hung up on what are found in other lists for example tongues or exorcism or prophecy but Paul says those are okay we could discuss those another time but the main line sort of things here which are the gifts of God are things like well as you see serving teaching encouraging giving leading showing mercy and things like that and my fifth point that the possession of a gift is generally speaking a call to use it the possession of a gift is generally speaking a call to use it it's not there's more to be said than that which he goes on to say that gifts need to be used in love and he would have other things to say as well but generally speaking the possession of a gift is a call to use it so if a man's gift is prophesying whatever exactly he meant by that well let that person prophesy if the person has a gift in serving verse 7 then let them serve if somebody has a gift of teaching then let them teach if somebody has a gift of encouraging others let them encourage if somebody is in a position to give to the needs of others then don't wait for

[33 : 58] God to particularly zap you if you've got that as a gift then use that gift if you have a gift of leadership then do it in the right way diligently if it's a gift of getting alongside people and showing

mercy perhaps helping in a quiet way then do that and do it cheerfully now what else can we say about these gifts well we can say that they fall into roughly two categories the gifts of saying things and the gifts of doing things so for the saying things I think we would say prophesying teaching encouraging leading are saying gifts word gifts word ministry and then there is also serving verse seven contributing showing mercy things like that which

I think were basically doing gifts and he says well this is what it is in the church there are all sorts of gifts all sorts of functions all sorts of things that people can do and the church works as a community as each one does the bit that they can do and I ask have you thought about this have you thought about what God has given you the ability to do because it's given you something for sure and the general principle is if you've got that ability then do seek in the right way to use it don't make Christianity a spectator sport where you sit and cheer other people as they run around the track but it's a community life now look at this a bit more next week but this is my aim sentence I'm not saying and Paul isn't saying we want people to be running around like headless chickens he doesn't just say serve actively he says first of all think spiritually think about God's mercy think about how much he's done for you and offer yourself to him and in offering yourself to him look around you at the possibilities there are maybe bigger maybe smaller not everybody has the same but there's something that you can do and do it