

# A Living, Gifted Church

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Preacher: Rev. Jonathan St. Clair

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at [ChristChurchEastBay.org](http://ChristChurchEastBay.org). Today's scripture reading is from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 12, verses 1 through 8, as printed in the liturgy.

A reading from Paul's letter to the Romans. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your true and proper worship. Do not conform 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 in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

[ 1 : 1 6 ] For 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, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith. If it is serving, then serve. If it is teaching, then teach.

If it is to encourage, then give encouragement. If it is giving, then give generously. If it is to lead, do it diligently. If it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning, Christ Church. We are in this three-week series talking about the church as the body of Jesus Christ, and we're looking at these New Testament texts that give us a basic manual and fundamental instructions for what it means to be the church that the resurrected Jesus launched by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And we're hoping to equip you all with a vision, the New Testament vision of the nature and purpose of the church. To help you see your role and the gifts that have been given to you by the Holy Spirit to build up the church.

[ 2 : 3 6 ] And then to think about the ways that your time and your talent and your treasures can be stewarded for the mission of the church. And so today, we're looking at this letter to the Romans.

And in terms of Christian doctrine, this is the greatest masterpiece that's ever been written. It's a colossal, incomparable statement of Christian truth.

And in our text today, the apostle opens up and he says, Therefore, in view of God's mercy. And that word, therefore, as we saw last week, that word, therefore, always points us back to the first part of the letter.

It emphasizes for us that the church and the body of Christ is something which follows as the logical consequence of what's gone before.

And what's gone before in Romans chapter 1 through 11 is that we've been given this panoramic view of the mercy of God. We've been given this systematic, comprehensive exposition of what the apostle says.

[ 3 : 39 ] And the very first line of the letter is the gospel of God, the good news of God. And we worked through most of that in the spring and summer of last year.

But maybe it's a little bit fuzzy for some of us. And I just want to briefly summarize so that you can understand this word, therefore. What is the mercy of God? What is the gospel of God that's been unfolded for us in Romans 1 through 11?

Well, if you go back and you look at Romans 1, you get this incredible doctrine of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And the fact that each of us, every person you ever meet, is made in the image of that God.

And yet, we're fallen. We sin against Him. And we're worshiping and we're serving created things rather than the Creator. That's what Romans 1 says.

Romans 2 and 3 then starts talking about the way that we all try to live better lives. And we try in all kind of ways to save ourselves and reconcile ourselves to God.

[ 4 : 41 ] But it doesn't work. We just, we can't do it. And then, the good news in Romans 3 and 4 is this doctrine of God's one and only way of salvation.

Justification by faith alone. That God comes to us and He takes all of our unrighteousness, all of our failures, all of our sin, and He puts it on to Jesus and He takes Jesus' righteousness and He puts it on to us and He declares us just and He declares us right before Him.

Romans 5 through 6 then gives us this doctrine of being united with Jesus. That we were in Adam. In Adam we failed.

But now we're in Jesus and in Jesus we triumph. We were dead with Adam but now we're alive with Christ, Paul says. And then we get into that great chapter, Romans 8, which gives us the doctrine of adoption.

That we've now come to share in the sonship of Jesus Himself. So that when we call out to God we can call Him our Abba Father. And that means that we've been born again.

[ 5 : 47 ] That we're new creatures. That we have a new life. A new nature. A new outlook on everything. And we want to live like Jesus. And not only do we want to live like Him but we have the power of the Holy Spirit to do it.

And then come these great doctrines of perseverance and glorification. That nothing shall separate us from the love of this God who's prepared a glorious inheritance beyond the grave, beyond death.

That when Jesus comes to establish the kingdom of God finally, fully, and forever, we will reign with Him. That's my best attempt to summarize what the therefore means.

Therefore, in view of all of this mercy of God, we now turn to the subject of the Christian church. And we turn to the subject of Christian conduct.

And we can see that all of it is simply a logical deduction from all the doctrines of God's mercy. And what the apostle goes on to tell us, he wants to tell us about being a living sacrifice.

[ 6 : 54 ] A body with many parts. And different gospel gifts. Therefore, in view of God's mercy, we've got to think out what it means to be a living sacrifice. A body with many parts.

And different gospel gifts. So let's talk first of all about being a living sacrifice. Again, verse 1, he says, Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your true and proper worship. And again, that therefore is turning us from exposition to exhortation. It's turning us from the indicatives of all that God has done for us and to us and in us.

And now it's turning us to the imperatives of what we must be and what we must do in response to the mercy of God. Doctrine to duty. Creed to conduct.

And this therefore tells us that the church, the body of Christ, is not merely a human society. It's way more than a gathering of just mere human beings.

[ 7 : 59 ] It's rather a spiritual and a supernatural gathering. That we're a family of brothers and sisters. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, people who've been radically transformed by the mercy of God.

God, this God, looked upon us in all of our folly and self-centeredness, all of our sin and our rebellion against him. He saw us in our miserable condition that we had brought upon ourselves.

And what did this God do? He had compassion on us. He pitied us. He had mercy on us. And he lavished upon us all the incredible gifts and benefits of salvation that we've just talked about in Romans 1 through 11.

Therefore, Paul says, in view of God's mercy, I urge you, I'm encouraging you and I'm exhorting you to just simply remind yourself of who you are.

That you are a people living under the mercy of God. And if you want to show your gratitude to God for his great mercy toward you, then, Paul says, this is the way you should live.

[ 9 : 06 ] And what follows is this remarkable summary of the new life in Jesus Christ, what we call the doctrine of sanctification. And again, here's how he says it.

He says, therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to what? To offer your bodies as a living sacrifice. To offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.

Now, that is calculated to shock us. And if you're not feeling shocked, you haven't really heard it correctly, this is the language of laying down a sacrificial animal before God.

Of putting yourself, as if you're the animal, up on the altar to God. And it's this totalitarian demand that you would yield yourself, you would surrender yourself entirely to God.

Now, this does not say that you should offer yourself as a sacrifice to God so that he might forgive you and accept you. No, Jesus has done that. Jesus is the once for all sacrifice for sins.

[ 10 : 11 ] But what it does mean is that you are to make yourself an offering of gratitude in response to the mercy of God. And it doesn't say to offer your things to God.

It doesn't say to offer your heart to God. It says, offer your, again, shocking, your bodies. Which means not just some of you, but all of you.

Your private and public self. Your individual and social self. Your inner and outer self. Offer your bodies. Not as a dead sacrifice, but as a living sacrifice.

Which means it's to be daily, continually, perpetually making yourself a living offering to God. And he says you're to offer your bodies as a sacrifice.

As a sacrifice. And a sacrifice implies that something needs to be put to death. Something must be killed. And what is it that has to die? What is it that has to die?

[ 11 : 14 ] It's this idea that you have the right to live as you choose. And that you belong to yourself. And that you know best what should happen in your life.

That has to be put to death. You've got to renounce all of your rights to yourself. And recognize that you no longer belong to yourself.

But that you belong to someone else. And so you have no right to live for yourself. But for that someone else. What he's saying here is we've got to take our hands off our life.

And all the control that we like to have over our life. We've got to give ourselves completely to God. Now I've found that many people really like the mercy of God part.

But a lot of people aren't so excited about the sacrifice yourself part. And maybe that's you today. You're like I'm not really ready to take my hands off of my life.

[ 12 : 15 ] Or you might say you know I trust the Bible. But I don't really like these things. And I'm only really going to do those things. And if that's you you need to know that you're actually still on the throne of your life.

You're still in the driver's seat of your life. And you're actually telling God that his will is in fact not totally good. Not totally pleasing. Not totally perfect.

You are still acting as if you belong to yourself. And deciding how all the things should go. And assuming that God simply doesn't know what he's doing.

That he's not wise. Or that he can't be trusted. And if that's you. I just want to lovingly invite you. To look today at Jesus. Look at Jesus.

And what did Jesus do? Jesus offered himself. Not as a living sacrifice. But as a dying sacrifice for you. He took his hands off of his life.

[ 13 : 20 ] And he became this dying sacrifice out of love for you. So that you could take your hands off of your life. And become a living sacrifice out of love for him.

And he's not asking you to do anything that he hasn't already done for you. We sing about this when we sing, when I survey the wondrous cross.

And we say this great line in that hymn. We say, love so amazing. So divine. What does it demand? It demands my soul. My life. My all.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy. To offer your bodies as a living sacrifice. With me so far?

That's the general principle. And now the apostle gets into some more specifics. And he talks about not just a living sacrifice. But being part of now a body with many parts.

[ 14 : 20 ] You're part of a body now with many parts. And I want to return to the apostle's favorite analogy of the church that we explored last week. Where he uses this term more than any of the others.

It's this famous picture and this wonderful illustration of the human body and the physical frame. And this is where we left off last week in Ephesians 4. It says, What the apostle's saying there is that each part of the body are parts of a whole.

And that none of the parts have any meaning in and of themselves except in relationship to all the other parts. And all of them together to the whole and especially to the head.

And so Paul is saying this yet again in this text. He says in verse 4, See the church is a living body.

And each part has its life from the head which is Christ. And the head is the place that houses the skull which houses our brain.

[ 15 : 53 ] And my understanding is our brain consists of about 100 billion neurons. And out of our brain come various nerves and a whole nervous system that runs all the way down our spinal column into all the rest of our body.

And all the control of the body. All the power of the body. All the movement of the body starts there in the head. And it's from the head which is Jesus that all the life and the energy is to go down into all the parts of the body.

So that each part is vitally and organically united to the head. And all the parts are really just extensions of and manifestations of the life of the head.

And that's what a Christian is. A Christian is somebody who's defined as a person who has the life and the energy of the head, Jesus, coming down into you.

And a Christian is someone who says, you know, apart from the head, the body as a whole and the parts individually can really do nothing. And to try to act on your own or to try to act independently apart from the thinking of the head, the mind of the head, the activity of the head, that's just outrageous, isn't it?

[ 17 : 14 ] But the apostle kind of goes beyond that. In verse 5 he says this. He says, So in Christ we, though many, form one body and each member belongs to all the others.

Now I wish we had time today to talk about the exquisite design of the eye, for example. Or the hand.

Right? Or we could talk about the intricate design of the ear or of the foot. Each of these parts having a variety of functions and doing different tasks for us.

But the question for us is, what would each one of these parts be without any of the others? Can you imagine if I showed up today and my eye just decided to start functioning on its own in isolation from my head and from my brain?

Or if my hand decided I'm going to do stuff apart from my arm and from the rest of my body? What good would it do if all the parts showed up today in me and said, you know, I don't belong to all the others?

[ 18 : 23 ] My doctor would say, Jonathan, you have a serious disease. You're in trouble. You see, every part has meaning as it's related to all the other parts and to the head.

And every single part, every single member has a function that's not merely important but that is essential to the working of the entire body.

And that if that particular part is not there, if that part does not belong as it were, the body will not only be abnormal, it will be incapable of functioning as it should.

Now, of course, people are resilient. We know people that have learned to live life and adapted their life without an arm or without a leg. And they're amazing.

But I'm not sure that's their ideal. And we all know, I think we'd agree, that there's a certain threshold, a certain baseline of organs and systems that we absolutely need.

[ 19 : 21 ] If I showed up today without my eyes and my hands and without my ears and my feet, and I showed up today even more than that, without my heart and my lungs and my GI tract and my muscles and my bones, not only would I not be much use to you, I would be dead.

I would be hurting very badly. Secondly, in a living church, there's no such thing as a non-essential Christian.

And no, there's no such thing as a church member being unimportant. If you just look around you at all the other parts of the body that are sitting around you today.

And last week I invited you to do that and nobody looked around. So just look around for a minute. You can turn your head and just look around at all the other parts of the body of Christ that are sitting around you.

And I want you to realize that these are all people, whether you know them or not, they can't go on without you. They are dependent on you.

[ 20 : 28 ] And all those people you just saw will suffer if you are not here and if you are not here in a fit condition to do your part. But when the body is functioning correctly, when it's functioning properly, there's a belonging, there's a cohesion, there's a harmony among all of the parts.

Now I called my brother this week who's a medical doctor. And I said, hey, just so I don't embarrass myself in front of the congregation this week. Are there actually any unimportant or non-essential parts in our anatomy and our physiology?

And I brought up the thyroid gland. I was like, tell me about the thyroid gland. I know nothing about that. I'm just a simple-minded pastor. And he said, okay, hey, if you go back to the time of Hippocrates and Galen, and my brother's a big nerd.

So that's kind of where he started and how he began the conversation. He said, if you go back, they knew that there was something important about the thyroid gland, even though they didn't actually know for a very long time what its function even was in the body.

You know, we had to wait a really long time until modern medicine to discover that the role of those thyroid hormones in metabolizing our bodies is actually really important.

[ 21 : 43 ] So if you haven't given thanks to God for your thyroid gland recently, do that. Do that today. You need that. And then I said, well, hey, what about the appendix? I was like, I knew I got him on the appendix.

And he was like, well, actually, you know, you're right. For a long time, people considered that to be a useless organ. You know, if your appendix ruptures, you just remove it as if it didn't really matter.

But he said recent research shows that it plays two beneficial roles. And it's helping us, number one, to fight off invading pathogens. And number two, it's helping to repopulate your gut with beneficial bacteria after you have GI issues.

And what was his point? His point was there are no non-essential, unimportant parts. That your thyroid and your appendix play a vital role in your health, whether you understand them or not and whether you appreciate them or not.

They're there doing work for you. And here's the insight that he said out loud that really stood out to me. He said, you know what, Jonathan?

[ 22 : 50 ] We're actually not, we're not really thinking about all the different parts of our bodies unless and until a particular part starts to break down and cause pain.

Then you start to think about that part. It's not like you get home at the end of a long day and you look down at your toes and you're like, thank you, guys. I mean, you did such amazing work today.

I'm so proud of you. Good job. No, your toes don't, they don't draw attention to themselves. If they're healthy, they just do the work. And, you know, if your toe gets infected, however, if your toe gets broken, it's going to send signals of pain through the rest of your body.

And so the point is we've got to keep all these little parts that we never even think about healthy. And in the Christian life, in the Christian church, this means that our supreme duty as individual parts of the body is to make sure that we are healthy.

And that there is no spiritual disease in me because if I suffer disease, the whole body is going to suffer disease and pain.

[ 24 : 03 ] And so the way you stay healthy is that every single part is always to be subordinate to the mind of the head, the will of the head, the control of the head, receiving moment for moment life and energy from the head so that whatever the head is giving you as a little part to do, you are able and ready to carry out what the head gives you to do.

Does that make sense? Okay, I've beaten this analogy as far down as I possibly can. And we've definitely gotten way beyond my medical knowledge.

So that's it. But in view of God's mercy, we're to be a living sacrifice. And the context in which we're to be a living sacrifice is in this body that has many parts.

And finally, the apostle wants us to think about the different gospel gifts that are given to each of the parts. Different gospel gifts given to each of the parts.

And this is what he's talking about in verse 6. He says, We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us. And what he's saying is that when we become a Christian, when we're regenerated, when we are born again from above and the Holy Spirit comes into us and we're made part of the body of Christ, the Spirit himself gives us spiritual, supernatural gifts that we did not have when we were born.

[ 25 : 41 ] That are not natural to us. He just graciously gives us these amazing gifts. And along with those gifts, the Spirit gives us a desire to see the kingdom of God expressed in the visible form of the church.

So that we want to do and play a part in the life and functioning of the thriving and the flourishing of that body, the church.

And that's what Ephesians 4 meant last week. Again, I'll read it. It says that we're to grow and build ourselves up in love as each part does its work.

Or as each part exercises its spiritual gift. And now the apostle is giving us a few examples, a few illustrations of particular gifts. These are not all the gifts listed in the New Testament.

And even all the gifts listed in the New Testament are not all the gifts. But here are some of the gifts and the ways that we are to exercise them. He says, first of all, there's the gift of prophecy.

[ 26 : 43 ] And prophecy is not foretelling the future. Prophecy is telling forth the Scripture. It's declaring and proclaiming God's Word that He puts into your mouth for the church's edification.

And the apostle in 1 Corinthians 14, he says this. He says, The one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging, and comfort.

You are to prophesy, he says, so that everyone might be instructed and might be encouraged. And how are you, if you have the gift of prophecy, how are you to exercise that gift?

He says, you're to do it in accordance with your faith or in accordance with the faith. Prophecy is supposed to be done in accordance with the standard of the body of truth given in the New Testament.

That order and system of the apostolic truth. The apostolic faith. That's what prophecy is supposed to emerge and arise and be aligned to. Well, what else do we need?

[ 27 : 46 ] In addition to the gift of prophecy, the church needs the gift of serving. And somebody with this spiritual gift of serving, they share something with Jesus.

Because Jesus describes Himself in Mark chapter 10, verse 45. He says, I've not come to be served, but rather I've come to serve. And that word that Jesus used means, I've come to wait on tables.

So, serving might mean for you literally serving food. Doing maintenance for the church. Organizing and providing for the material needs of the church.

Doing administrative work. Serving our kids. Serving our youth. Serving our youth. I was thinking this week about how important our welcome and hospitality teams are.

And the reason their service is so important is because if you're on that team, you're the first people that are encountered as they enter into or exit from the church.

- [ 28 : 45 ] And so, what you do there, if you smile, if you offer love to people, if you give them a good and not a cheap cup of coffee, you are helping them and you are enabling them to receive all the other ministry of the gospel that's on offer in this place.

Your serving is incredibly important. But what else does the church need in addition to prophecy and serving? Well, there's this gift of teaching. This gift of teaching.

People who teach are able, as Paul says elsewhere, to rightly divide the word of truth. And then to pass on the truth of the gospel as it's been preserved in the Bible. To help people understand what the divine author of this book actually intended.

And to build up and encourage people to be built up in and established in the Christian faith. So, we need the gift of teaching.

And we also need the gift of encouraging. What is encouraging? Well, encouraging is simply urging someone to live out the truth of the gospel. It's what Paul's doing here when he says, Therefore, I urge you.

- [ 29 : 56 ] Therefore, I encourage you. Therefore, I exhort you. Same word. I exhort you to apply all the doctrines of the gospel to your ethics. Paul is trying to drive the truth from our mind down into our heart and down into our will.

That's what someone who has the gift of encouragement will do for you. They exhort you and they motivate you to a deeper spiritual commitment. They rouse you and they stimulate you to further action.

And my experience is that someone with the gift of encouragement typically calls you to prayer. Why? Because prayer is the place where the Holy Spirit puts courage in you.

And that's what it means to be encouraged. So we need all these gifts of prophecy, serving, teaching, encouraging.

And then he says there's that gift, that great gift of giving. And this is a person who shares their resources of their food and their clothes and their money and their house to meet the needs in the church.

- [ 31 : 08 ] And how does he say we're to exercise that gift of giving? He says do it generously, which literally means to do it in a simple, straightforward way with no ulterior motives, no strings attached, no weird power dynamics, no sense of patronage, no sense of expectations on a return on your investment.

Just give generously, period. And then there's this incredible gift of leading. Or it's also translated providing for others.

You might be an elder, you might be a community group leader, you might be somebody who coordinates care. How are you to lead? He says you're to do it diligently.

Or another way to translate that is to do it zealously, to do it with energy, to put your back into it. If you're going to lead, just lead. And is that all the church needs to be healthy?

No, he adds this one final gift. It's an incredible gift that he calls mercy. And we're back to where we started, aren't we? Because as God met our misery with his mercy, people with this gift of mercy then take that mercy out to visit the sick, to care for the elderly and the disabled, to comfort the grieving, to provide for widows and orphans and the foreigner and the poor.

- [ 32 : 33 ] And how are we to exercise this gift of mercy? He says we're to avoid that dutiful, grudging, downcast attitude. And we're rather to do it with cheerfulness because cheerfulness is what will lessen someone's pain and help them feel better the moment you walk in the door.



So whatever your gift, and again, there are many more gifts than these. Whatever your gift, you need to exercise that gift to the full.

You need to roll up your sleeves and do it with all your might for the glory of God and the good of the church. Another translation of verse 6 says, Having gifts that differ, let us use them.

Let us use our different gifts. There should be no unemployed, passive Christians who only come to receive and not to give, who only come to consume and not to contribute.

That's not right. The head of the body is counting on you to work hard at the part and with the gift that he's given to you. And there are some people here, you need to know that there are some people here in this room today that can only be touched by your gift.

[ 33 : 46 ] There are some people here today, they have your name written on them. And you might not have even met them yet. And if they come here and you don't come and you don't exercise your gift on their behalf, you're resisting the will of the Holy Spirit in your life.

But if they come and if you show up and you exercise your gift for their sake, we're told that the body of Christ will grow.

It will grow healthy, it will grow strong. It will, as Paul says in Ephesians 4, just simply build itself up in love. Each part doing its work, each person, each member exercising their gift as a living sacrifice in response to the mercy of God.

So may God give us the grace to do this very thing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen.