

Responding to the Mercy of God

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[0 : 00] I will please take a seat. Let me pray for us. I'll also pray for Andrew Reid, who's actually at another church preaching this morning, to help them out.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word, and we pray that as we hear it taught, and as the folk, our brothers and sisters at Camberwell, I think it is, hear Andrew preach, you might help us all to understand your word, and as we prayed before, and not just understand it, but to live it out.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, some time ago, our eldest son got in trouble and was sent from the dinner table straight to bed.

You see, he refused to eat dinner that night. He didn't like it, which was a bit of a blow, because I actually cooked it. It's one of the rare occasions I actually cooked, and so I was very put out.

But anyway, he got in trouble, and in the end, he was sent to his room and missed out on dinner.

Then later on, I heard these words, crying out from his bedroom, I'm hungry.

[1 : 09] But of course, whose fault was that? It was his fault. However, after a while, I went in and spoke to him. He apologised, and so I said, do you want me to go and get you some toast and bring it in to you?

And at that, his face lit up and said, oh, thanks, Dad. You're the best. You're so good. At which I said, yeah, keep going. No, I didn't say that. I said, that's okay.

To which he then added, as he's done on other occasions, actually, he said, I'm going to be so good for you. And he actually was. He had his toast, and he went straight to sleep afterwards, and he was very good. For the whole nine hours, he was asleep.

Next morning was a different story. But the point of the story is that although he deserved to go to bed without dinner, he was shown mercy. And in response, well, his response was one of thanks and eagerness to please the one who had showed mercy to him.

As we come to Romans chapter 12, this morning, Paul urges us to have the same response to God's mercy, which is far, far more significant than the mercy I've shown Tim.

[2 : 16] Now, this morning, we're going to spend most of our time on the first paragraph, the first two verses, because they pretty much summarize the rest of the letter.

You see, up to this point, chapters 1 to 11, Paul has been laying what we call the theological groundwork, explaining what the story is. And from chapter 12 onwards comes the application. But the rest of the application is pretty much summarized by verses 1 and 2. If you can get verses 1 and 2, you can get the rest. The rest are just examples of how verses 1 and 2 work itself out in life. And so Paul begins by reminding us of this mercy. Point 1, verse 1, he says, Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, and on he goes.

Now, Paul starts there with the word therefore, and as I've said before, when you see the word therefore, you need to ask what it's there for. And it's there to point us back, to remind us, in other words, of God's great mercy.

[3 : 22] The mercy we've seen in the first 11 chapters of this letter. Remember chapter 1? We heard that the wrath of God has been revealed against all humankind because of their godlessness and wickedness.

Why? Well, verse 128, For although we knew God, we neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but our thinking became futile and our foolish hearts were darkened.

Chapter 3, verse 10, There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands. There is no one who seeks God. All have turned away. They have together become worthless.

There is no one who does good, not even one. And this was the story of the first few chapters of Romans. This is who we are, deserving of God's judgment or wrath, deserving now to be under it and to face it fully on that last day.

I once heard a story of a couple who were driving to church that Sunday morning and they had a, or shall we say, a heated discussion in the car on the way to church. It sometimes happens, I'm told. [4 : 29] It never happened to me. I only live next door, so we can avoid that. And as they came into church, there was a hymn being sung. It was the hymn Amazing Grace, which I'm sure you know well.

And so they found their place in church and joined in singing. And they're up to the line, Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like, and they turned to each other, you. But of course, we are all wretches. That's the point in the first half of the letter of Romans. We've all turned aside, utterly godless, wicked, and thoroughly and completely deserving of judgment. judgment. But, but, God gave his son, Jesus, to face that judgment we deserve, to endure it that we deserve.

And as Paul writes in chapter 3, verse 25, God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement. In other words, Jesus took God's wrath, the wrath that we deserve, so that we can go free by simply believing in Jesus.

[5 : 36] And so, chapter 8, verse 1, that great verse, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Although we deserve condemnation, there is none for us who believe in Jesus.

And even our ability to believe in Jesus is a gift from God. And so, as we heard last week from chapter 9, verse 16, our salvation does not therefore depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy, he said.

You see, it's all about God's mercy. In fact, the word mercy in verse 1 here of chapter 12 is literally mercies. It's plural. I think it's plural because Paul wants to capture the multifaceted aspects of God's to show how great it is that while we were really, really bad and undeserving, God was really, really merciful and giving.

This is what Paul wants his readers to remember, to ponder, to look back at God's mercy. Because it is something that we can all forget, isn't it? We can hear it so many times, become so familiar with it that we even take it for granted.

But we mustn't do that. We must continue to remember how great God's mercy is, to marvel at it. Charles Wesley, the hymn writer, wrote, He's amazed, you see, at God's mercy.

[7 : 06] Or the next line, Amazing love, how can it be that thou, my God, should die for me? He's amazed, you see, at God's grace and mercy.

That's what Paul wants us to remember. He wants us to remember. He's as though he's saying in verse 1, look back at this amazing mercy and remember it so that you might respond to it.

Point to verse 1 again. He says, 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. Now the first thing to notice here is that our worship, our offering of ourselves to God, is a response to God's mercy.

It's never to earn God's mercy. And the order is very important and I know many of you know this, but I still meet Christians who get the order back to front. I go to church to please God so that he might let me into heaven.

[8 : 10] No, no, no. You go to church because he's already guaranteed you of heaven. Because he's already given you mercy. If you are here this morning and have not received this mercy, then simply coming to church and doing good things won't get you God's mercy.

Rather, believing in Jesus will. Believe in Jesus and God will give it to you for free. It's the best deal on the planet. But once we understand how great God's mercy is, once we have received it, then in response we are to offer our bodies, our whole lives sacrifice to God.

The word offer here is the word present which is what the Old Testament priests used to do. They used to worship God by presenting a sacrifice to God that was holy and pleasing. Of course, in the Old Testament the thing about a sacrifice is that it was killed.

It was a key part of a sacrifice. Sacrifice was killed, dead, and dedicated to God. And so what Paul is saying here in the New Testament he's saying, well actually, we don't physically die, we're to be a living sacrifice, but we are to be dead to our old way of life and dedicated to God in our new way of life.

It's what Paul has already said in chapter 6 that we have died to sin with Christ and so now we are to live to God, holy or set apart for God, pleasing to God.

[9 : 32] We are to live our whole lives for God. Not for ourselves, not for our career, not for our children or grandchildren, but for God. We saw a glimpse of this in our first reading.

Hannah received mercy in the gift of a child and a response to God's mercy. What did she do? She offered back the thing that was most precious to her, her son, dedicated to God.

I know of a lady at our church, she goes to the 8am congregation, she comes, I think it's every Tuesday morning when the ESL classes are on, just to see if there are any children of parents learning English so she can look after them.

Many weeks there are no children so she just goes back home again. If there are children she'll just stay and look after them every week just coming up to serve in that way. You see, that's a living, that's a living sacrifice, sacrificing her time even if she turns up and there could be no one there, she just turns up anyway just in case, sacrificing her time to serve God in this way.

And now of course it looks different for different people, that's just one example of being a living sacrifice. But of course this is how we worship God. That's what Paul says at the end of verse 1 there.

[10 : 47] He says this is your true and proper worship. The phrase true and proper is sometimes translated as our spiritual worship but the Greek word behind this is *logikos* which is where we get the word logical from.

In other words, it's actually rational worship. This is our reasonable or rational worship. In other words, worship is not meant to be mindless but mindful.

We see this in verse 2 where he talks about being transformed, formed by the renewing of our minds. I once went to church where the service leader says I want you to empty your minds of everything.

Don't think about anything and just think nothing and let God talk to you in the quietness. Now God can do that but Christianity is not about leaving our mind at the door.

It's not mindless Christianity, it's mindful. Yes, we are to empty our minds of the thing distraction, sure, but we're never to completely empty our minds. It's not mindless worship, it's mindful.

[11 : 50] And notice that this mindful worship is about presenting our bodies, our whole lives to God. And if it's our whole lives, our whole bodies, then worship is much more than what we do here on Sunday, isn't it?

I was speaking at a conference recently where on the program it had worship time 9am to 9.30. Now what they meant by that was singing and singing is certainly part of worship but worship didn't happen just between 9am and 9.30am.

Or when people ask you where do you worship, they mean where do you go to church. But I take it you don't just worship God on Sundays between 10am and 11.15am, do you? I hope not because here worship is about offering our whole bodies, our whole lives.

It's a 24-7 thing, not just a Sunday thing. It is living our whole lives for God. That's what worship is. How are we to do this?

Well, verse 2 explains. It says, 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.

[13 : 00] You see, the way that we are to offer ourselves to God and worship Him is not to conform but be transformed, He's saying. It's two sides of the one coin. On the one side, we do not conform to this world or literally this age.

We are not to conform to its attitudes and practices as it seeks to mould us into its likeness. It's hard to resist sometimes, isn't it? We feel the pressure to conform to society and the world's attitudes.

And if we're honest, some churches have started to crack under this pressure. So, for example, some churches say that homosexuality is okay when the Bible says it is not.

They're starting to conform to the world, you see. There's male headship in marriage and so on.

The point of what Paul is saying is don't let society, don't let the world mould you.

Rather, stand against it even if the pressure is hard, even if it's unpopular, even if it costs us. Do not conform to the world's ways.

[14 : 05] Instead, be transformed, it says. How? Well, by the renewing of our minds. The mind is important because what we think often determines how we act, doesn't it?

Michelle used to think that a tea towel was there to get the bits of dirt and food off the plate that the person washing the dishes missed. And it caused, it was our first fight in our marriage, actually. I was drying, she was washing, she handed me a plate that had some food still on it. I said, oh, you haven't washed that properly, here you go. And she said, well, that's what the tea towel's for. I went, what? I couldn't believe it.

But you see, the way she thought influenced the way she acted. And the same with me, the way I thought influenced the way I acted. Now, I'd like to say that I've now renewed her mind and I just did the dishes instead and now we have a dishwasher.

But what we think often determines how we live. So in chapter one, we had a depraved mind that led to all sorts of evil behavior. Chapter 128, since we did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to their depraved mind to do what ought not to be done. [15:16] A depraved mind leads to doing what ought not to be done. And it goes on in chapter one to list some things. But now that we have received mercy, we have to renew our minds so that our thinking will be different and that will lead to different behavior.

We have to renew our minds so that we might think God's thoughts after him and in turn behave appropriately, behave as he's created us to behave, behave as the rest of the letter outlines. And as we do this, we'll be able to, verse two, test and approve what God's will is. Attest and approve not in the sense of sitting in judgment of God's will and giving him the tick of approval. Oh, you got that one, good God. Well done. But I don't like this one. We'll have to work on this one. That's not what it means in verse two. Rather, having a renewed mind leads to approving of God's will in the sense of recognizing it as right and good and saying, yes, that's right.

I want to do that. I want to live that way. As we recognize and live out God's will, then our lives will be transformed. And notice, we're not alone in this.

[16:22] It doesn't say transform yourselves by the renewing of your mind, does it? It says be transformed by the renewing of your mind. You see, as we seek to renew our minds, God's spirit works in us and enables us to transform our behavior.

We're not alone, in other words. But how do we renew our minds? Well, no surprises here. It's by reading the Bible. Yes, sure, God can shape our lives through experiences and so on.

He can do that, yes. But it is the Bible that helps us to think God's thoughts after him because it's the Bible that shows us God's thoughts. It's the Bible through which the spirit primarily speaks. Ephesians chapter six, the sword of the spirit is the word of God. And so as we read the Bible, God's spirit works in us, convicting us. Renewing our minds so that we may see the truth of God's will.

And once we see it, the spirit then helps us to live it, to be transformed. When I first got my license, I was a typical 18-year-old boy and I used to drive faster than I should have, I must confess, and I used to do what everyone else used to do with the speed cameras, you know, you know the traffic, you're following a traffic speed camera, everyone slows down, they pass the camera and then they speed up again.

[17:40] And my rationale was that if I sped, I could spend less time on the road and more time at my destination where I had to be. So I was actually being efficient. Dodgy, yeah, I know, I know. I know now, it's okay.

But I was reading the next passage in Romans, Romans chapter 13, where it says, submit to the authorities. And I remember reading this at university and being convicted of it.

I thought, yeah, that is right. That is how you're supposed to live. And so it changed the way I thought. No longer was it about efficiency, but it was about obeying God's will.

And since then, my driving has transformed, you see. That's just an example of how this works out in practice. Reading the Bible renews our minds and the Spirit works in us to convict us of what we read and help us in turn to live transformed lives.

So I guess the question for us then is, are we reading our Bibles? I know there are many here who are very faithful in reading the Bibles, your Bibles. But there are others here who I guess it's hard for us.

[18:44] Can I encourage you to keep working hard at it? For it's in the Scriptures that we see the will of God, that we are able to think God's thoughts after him. And so renew our minds and live transformed lives.

Lives that are a living sacrifice, dead to ourselves, but dedicated to God. And so what Paul does from verse 3 to the rest of the letter is to show us what a living sacrifice looks like in practical terms. And in verses 3 to 21, it means essentially relating rightly, whether it's to ourselves or to one another or to God or to the world. We'll look at this very briefly. Verse 3, he says, 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.

Paul is saying here, relate rightly to yourself. Have a right view of yourself. Don't think too highly of yourself. Yes, we are precious to God. Yes, he gave Jesus to die for us.

We are precious to him, but don't think too highly of yourself. Don't be too puffed up with pride, but rather think with sober judgment in accordance with the faith he has distributed to each of us.

[19 : 56] I don't think Paul is saying here according to how much faith he's given you. I think he's saying according to the faith he has given to us. That is the gospel. Because when we think of ourselves according to the gospel, we remember that we were once undeserving sinners, saved by God's grace and mercy.

And that helps us to not be too proud, doesn't it? It helps us to be humble, to think of ourselves with sober judgment. And this is important if we are to serve at church.

See verses 4 to 5. He says, 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.

As we'll see in the following chapters of Romans, there is some friction between the Jews and the Gentiles in this church. And so Paul is already laying the groundwork here by saying, don't think of yourselves too highly and remember that you're actually part of one body.

So don't, you know, disharmony and pride, they're out of place. You're part of one family, one body. Rather, each person is as important as the other.

[21 : 10] In fact, verse 5, he says we belong to each other. Did you notice that? You see, we don't come to church to solely be served, but we come to church to serve others because we belong to them.

Verse 5. This is part of what it means to worship God, to be a living sacrifice. During a church service at another church, there was a moment for people to say good morning like we've had just a moment ago.

And at this other church, when the service leader said, please take some time to say hello to one another, a man said in a loud voice, I come to church to worship God, not meet people. But you see, part of worshipping God is to meet people, is to serve people, because verse 5, you belong to them.

God saves us to a family, to serve one another, to encourage one another, to give us different gifts with which to serve one another.

And so, says Paul, then serve. Verse 6 to 8. 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.

[22 : 20] 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, then do it cheerfully, he says.

You see, because we belong to each other, God gives us different gifts to serve each other with, to complement each other. I stood next to Paul Barker when he was here a couple of Sundays ago.

Gee, can he sing? He's got a great voice. I'd love to be able to sing like that, but quite frankly, I cannot. It's not one of my gifts. In fact, I was leading, when I was a student minister, I was leading the church service, and I was asked to stand away from the microphone when singing.

I just can't sing. But that's okay. We've got given different gifts. That's okay. God gives us different gifts to complement each other and to serve each other with because we belong to each other.

And so, says Paul, serve with whatever gift you have because you belong to one another. You're part of one body. In view of God's mercy, Paul says, we're to relate rightly to ourselves with humility and willing service.

[23 : 30] But secondly, we're to relate rightly to one another and God. And so he goes on in verse 9, he says, love must be sincere. Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the law. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. And on he goes.

Now, there are lots of commands here, and we don't have time to look at them in detail. But they are the very opposite of the things described for us in chapter 1. In chapter 1, when we were under God's wrath, we were described as heartless and loving evil.

Here, we are to have a sincere heart and hate evil. In chapter 1, we were described as God-haters and boastful. Here, we are to serve God and not be proud. This is what it means to live a transformed life, you see.

And behind all these commands really stands the two great commandments, to love God and love our neighbour. See, love God, verse 11, never be lacking zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour serving the Lord.

[24 : 36] The word fervour can also mean to be on fire for the Lord, which is hard to do sometimes, isn't it? To keep serving God, especially when we get hit with heartache or affliction, which is why Paul goes on to say in verse 12, be joyful in hope.

Remember your hope, your heavenly hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. You see, as we remember our hope of heaven, it will help us to persevere in service to God.

Kind of like going on a jet plane, you're going to some brilliant destination and you hit some turbulence. You think about where you're heading to get through that turbulence. That's what Paul is saying here.

Think about the hope of heaven to help you persevere through the turbulent times of life and be faithful in prayer, he says, that God might help us to keep serving him.

And we're to love others. Verse 10, we're to be devoted to one another in love, it says. To put others first. Verse 13, we're to share with those in need. We're to practice hospitality, which by the way, is not having friends and family you know well over.

[25 : 37] Hospitality in the Bible is actually entertaining strangers. And that's why you've got share with the Lord's people, that's one form, that's what we call hospitality, and then practice hospitality, strangers.

This is what we are to do to love one another. And we need to particularly work hard at this 10am congregation because we're so big. There's still people who come and might say, you know, nod to one or two other people, but then they'll leave, not really having spoken to many people.

Because no one's, you know, gone up to them and spoken to them. You can't get around to everyone here, we're too big, I understand that. But we need to keep working hard. There's some people who, when they see new people, invite them around for lunch that Sunday.

That's practicing hospitality. hospitality. That's what we need to keep working hard at so that we might grow together in unity. One thing we are doing well at, I think, is verse 15 and 16. It says, rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn, live in harmony with one another.

Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. I've been very encouraged by the way that people here have been caring for one another, particularly over the recent months where we have lost many people through death at this and the 8am congregation.

[26 : 54] Yet we have been mourning with those who have mourned and we've been supporting one another. So, thank you. Well done. That's living out the transformed life, being a living sacrifice.

It shows love for one another. And this is meant to be the distinguishing mark of us, is it not?

Remember what Jesus said? By this shall all people know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

Are we to relate rightly to ourselves and to God and to the world? And verse 17 onwards, he seems to shift focus from one another to everyone.

So he says, do not repay evil for evil, but be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath.

For it is written, it is mine to avenge, I will repay, says the Lord. Here, Paul is saying that we need to work hard at loving not just those inside the church, but also those outside the church.

[27 : 55] As far as it is possible, be at peace with everyone, he says. And that means, verse 19, not taking revenge. I mean, it's a bit hard to maintain peace if we're trying to take revenge, isn't it?

Now, this doesn't mean there is no need for police or defense forces. We'll see that in Romans 13. There is a right place for that. Rather, Paul is saying we're not to take justice into our own hands. You know, the world says don't get mad, get even. That's what the world says. But a transformed life says don't even get even, but love by doing good.

See verse 20? On the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. Do good. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

We are to love by helping even our enemies, giving them food or drink or whatever they need. Now, I used to think, by the way, that heaping burning coals was actually a loophole for revenge.

[28 : 57] You know, I can't take revenge, but I'll be so nice to you that you'll feel bad and then I'll get a, you know, a bit of a jab in there, a bit of revenge in the end. But that's not what Paul is saying here.

Verse 9 has already said we must love sincerely. So what Paul is talking about here is genuine love that seeks their good. And in the process, hopefully they will be shamed into repentance and be saved because that's their ultimate good, is it not?

Then ultimately, good will triumph over evil, you see. This is how we are to love even our enemies.

In view of God's mercy, Paul says, we are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice.

This will mean seeing ourselves rightly, loving God, loving one another and loving even those who persecute us in the world. Let me finish.

That night that Tim went to bed without dinner and was shown mercy, he said, thanks, Dad, I'm going to be so good for you. But as I said, by the next morning, I was not the case.

[29 : 55] I had to remind him of the mercy he'd received the night before. And when I did, he put down the pillow he was about to hit his sister with. And it's the same with us. We need to keep remembering God's mercy.

Keep pondering it. Keep being amazed at God's mercy at the cross of Christ. That we might not underestimate how great it is, but rather be motivated by it.

To live our whole lives as a living sacrifice to God. Let's pray that he would help us do this. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your mercy towards us in Jesus Christ.

Help us to consider Christ, that we might be a living sacrifice to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. We're going to see