

Responding to God's Mercy and Christ's return

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 May 2016

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Well, as some of you know, my wife Michelle is overseas at the moment. For her birthday last year, her parents bought her a ticket to see her brother in Sweden, which just happens to coincide with the Eurovision Song Contest last night.

Purely coincidental. And she's now gone, been gone now for nine days, 20 hours and 15 minutes. Now, I'd like to say that I'm managing just fine.

However, I'm yet to manage getting all the lunches done in time, and so the kids have had a lunch order almost every day last week. Megan, it's also, I realised this morning that it's been nine days, 20 hours and 16 minutes since Megan last brushed her hair, which apparently is not a good thing for a girl.

But since Michelle has left, I've been moved by the kindness of people from this congregation, actually. Although not only. I provided meals, made sincere offers to help, and in one case, even came to my place and did my daughter's hair for a dance competition.

Which is great, because I have no idea what a bun is, except those things you get from a bakery. Now, I don't particularly deserve such kindness, it was our decision for her to go, and yet people have taken the initiative to give it.

[1 : 18] And the point is, I've been so overwhelmed with such kindness and mercy, that it's moved me to give God thanks for you, and indeed motivated me to keep serving you as your pastor.

And as I was reflecting on this, I thought, how much more so ought the mercy of God motivate us all to keep serving him? And that's what we saw last week.

So grab your Bibles and just flick back for a moment to chapter 12. Have a look there, chapter 12, verse 1. He says, As we heard last week, God's mercy is meant to move and motivate us, to offer our bodies, that is, our whole lives, to God in worship.

And if it's our whole lives, then our worship is not just on Sundays, but every day. Every day we are to work at not conforming to the world's ways, but being transformed to live God's ways.

Why? Well, in response to God's great mercy to us. God's mercy in Christ is the key reason to live Christian lives, where we worship God.

[2 : 57] And yet, it also is a reason that we're so familiar with that it sometimes fails to move us. We can forget how much trouble we were in, and therefore, how great God's mercy is.

A couple of years ago, a boat carrying three fishermen capsized off West Australian coast. And after being at sea for a day, a seven-use helicopter spotted one of them praying to be saved. So I think I'll go to the next slide. Here he is, praying to be saved. And this was not only because he was exhausted from treating water and likely to drown, but also because on the next slide, there were sharks, hammerhead sharks, approaching.

You see, this man was in serious trouble, wasn't he? He was in danger of death. And yet, because of the helicopter radioed in on the next slide, came the rescue boat, and he was saved.

And the story goes, as I was reading the report, that he was so incredibly thankful to those who rescued him that he hugged and clung to them. And yet, we have been saved from a fate much, much worse than that.

[4 : 10] For we were all in danger, not of death, but eternal death. Hell, the Bible says. And unlike this fisherman, we didn't deserve to be saved. No, instead, we deserved judgment.

As Paul put it on the next slide from Romans 3, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And because of that, we deserve judgment. But in the very next verse, on the next slide, Paul continues by saying, We are justified, that is made right with God freely.

Freely. By his grace. Through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. See, God in his mercy gave his only son to die for us.

To take our judgment in our place. So that we who believe might be saved from it. And so if you were here this morning and you don't yet believe in Jesus, Then like the man in the water, you are in danger.

But the danger is eternal judgment. Yet like the man in the water, you too can be saved from it. For in God's mercy, he gave his son to die for you. So that if you believe, if you turn and trust in him, you'll be saved.

[5 : 16] It's the great news of the Christian message. So do you believe in Jesus? Do you trust him with your life? And for us who do, then does God's mercy still move you?

I mean, we deserve judgment for our sin. And yet God instead chose us and then gave what was most precious to him. His only son to die for us.

Does that mercy still move you? Now, you may be wondering why I'm spending so much time looking at chapter 12 when we're actually looking at chapter 13 today. And the reason is, is because chapter 13 is really a continuation of what Paul began last week in chapter 12.

You see, as Dev showed us last week, chapter 12 goes on to give us examples of what our worship to God looks like in response to God's great mercy. And chapter 13 this week, Paul continues to give us more examples of how we'd respond to God's great mercy in worship.

So what is this next example? Well, it's chapter 13, verse 1. It's to submit willingly. So point to chapter 13, verse 1. He says, Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.

[6 : 36] Here, part of our worship to God includes submitting willingly, he says, to the governing authorities, to be subject to them, to sit under their rule, even if we didn't vote for them.

But both Australia and America have elections coming up, just in case you've been living in a bubble. And both elections look to be close, almost 50-50. And if that continues, then out of the millions who vote, almost 50% of us will not get the person we voted for.

But however we feel, in view of God's mercy, we are to submit willingly. But why is this part of our worship to God? Well, Paul continues with the reason, in the rest of verse 1.

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for or because there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted. And those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. See, we are to submit willingly to those authorities because God has put them there.

[7 : 43] And we see this idea all the way through the scriptures, the Bible. So on the next slide, we read in Daniel chapter 2, he changes times and seasons. He sets up kings and he deposes them.

Or even Jesus, at his trial, he says to Pilate, You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. See, God is in control of the authorities.

He established them. To disobey them is to disobey God who put them there. So we are to submit willingly to them. For God has established them so that there may be order in society for our good. And that means we'll also submit willingly, even if we can get away with not submitting. A friend of mine used to deliberately set his cruise control in a 100-kilometre zone to 110 because he had heard that the police give you a 10% leeway with the radar and so on.

And so he figured he could exceed the speed limit by 10 kilometres and be safe. Now, immediately part of us is thinking, Oh, that's good to know. But the point is, I don't know if it's true or not, but more than the point, we are to obey the authorities regardless of whether we'll be caught or not.

[9 : 00] Why? Because God put them there for the good order of society. So to disobey them means we disobey God. And what's more, if we don't submit, then they will sometimes catch us and they have every right to punish us.

So verse 3, he says, For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended.

For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid. For rulers do not bear the sword for no reason.

Now, they are God's servants, agents of wrath, to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. You see, the authorities are God's servants for our good, but that also means they have the right to punish us if we do wrong.

They can exercise God's judgment on God's behalf to maintain justice, peace and order. You see, Paul ended chapter 12 by saying, Do not take revenge, but leave room for God's wrath.

[10:01] For it is written, it is mine to avenge, I will repay, says the Lord. We heard that with the kids talk. Now, of course, God will do that fully and finally on the last day, on judgment day in the future. But God also does it through the authorities he has established in the present.

And so Paul says in verse 3, Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right. This is why I love passing speed cameras, right? I love it because have you ever noticed how people slow right down to well below the speed limit as the camera is coming up?

And then they speed up to well over it afterwards. But when they're slowing down, I can just go in the right lane. I love it because I just stick to the speed limit straight through, no fear. You want to be free from fear?

Then Paul says, Do what is right. What's more, doing the right thing also means the authorities will commend or literally praise you, he says. In Roman society, when people did good works for society, they were praised.

It still happens today, though probably not as much. And so think of the Order of Australia and those kind of civil awards or perhaps a bonus or promotion at work and so on. Well, that's the authority commending you.

[11:09] But the point is, verse 5, Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment, but also as a matter of conscience.

You see, part of our worship to God means submitting willingly to these authorities, not only to avoid possible punishment, but out of conscience. For God is the one who has had mercy on us and he has put them there for our good.

And so we are to obey them. Now, of course, there are two common questions that often arise out of this, questions I'm guessing most of you have been thinking. And the first is, what if the authorities are dodgy or downright evil?

Do we have to obey them? And the answer is, yes. I mean, every authority is sinful because all people are sinful. And even those who are downright evil, God has established them.

And so we are to willingly submit to them. Unless, here's the exception, they tell us to do something that is contrary to God's word. And at that point, we must obey God, the higher authority, not man.

[12:17] And so in the Bible, when King Darius issues a law that said Daniel was not allowed to pray, at that point, Daniel rightly disobeyed the king and prayed. But you might remember, he also was willing to suffer the consequences for it.

Or the apostles in Acts chapter 5, they were told they were no longer to tell people about Jesus, to which they replied, we must obey God, not men. Now, I used to think that these exceptions to obey are unlikely to affect us here in Australia.

But having seen recent trends over the last couple of years, there may just come a day when certain authorities tell us that we cannot share the gospel on our lunch break or in our free time.

At that point, we must obey God rather than man and be willing to suffer the consequences for it. But these are the exceptions. And our minds often go to the exceptions, don't they?

But most of the time, we can and must submit willingly. Even if they are dodgy authorities. But this raises a second question, why does God even allow evil authorities to rule?

[13:24] And the bottom line is, we don't know. But we do know that they will be held responsible for their actions. They will have to give an account of how well they have served as God's servants or not.

What's more, we also know that God works good out of evil. We only need to look at the evil authorities of Jesus' day. They had him crucified. And yet God put them there for that very reason and worked the greatest good in history out of those evil authorities.

So our job is to trust God and in response to his mercy, submit willingly. And that includes paying what we owe. Have a look at verse 6. This is also why you pay taxes.

For the authorities are God's servants who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them. If you owe taxes, pay taxes. If revenue, then revenue. If respect, then respect. If honour, then honour. The key idea here is paying what we owe. Because God has established the authorities, given them a job to do, then we must pay what we owe them for that job.

[14:31] As Jesus said, give to Caesar what is Caesar's. Now of course we can make legal tax deductions and so on. There's nothing wrong with that because we don't owe those deductions. But

then after that, we must pay what we owe in order for the government to govern.

And it's not just money like taxes we owe. It's also respect and honour to those people who are over us. That is appropriate for the position that they're in. And that even includes our bosses at work. It's so easy to complain about your boss in a way that disrespects and dishonours them. Now it doesn't mean we have to agree with them. And even if they're out to unfairly dismiss you, which I know this is true for a few people here, then use whatever legal means you can.

After all, God has established those legal means as authorities too. But we must do so in a manner that respects their position, even if they don't personally deserve it. I mean, can you imagine what a powerful witness that would be to the rest of your colleagues?

Well, with the mention of paying what we owe, Paul now turns to something that we'll always owe, love. So point three, verse eight. He says, let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another.

[15:48] For whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and whatever other commandment there may be are summed up in this one command.

Love your neighbour as yourself. Love does no wrong to the neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law. Now, Paul says here, we're not to let any debt remain outstanding.

That is, we're to pay what we owe, taxes and taxes and so on. If it's a mortgage, then we're to pay that little by little, which is the only way you can do it these days. But we're to keep paying what we owe, yet there is one thing that we'll never pay off, one thing that we always owe, and that's love for each other.

In other words, we are to love continually. We can never get to the end of the week and say, okay, my love quota has full, I'm switching off. Now, in view of God's mercy and love to us, we're to love one another continually.

And like with submitting willingly, Paul adds another reason that we're to love continually. He says, for love is the fulfilment of the law.

[16:59] Love fulfils God's Old Testament law. Paul quotes the commandments in those verses 9 to 10 there, which are from the second half of the Ten Commandments, which are all about how to deal with each other.

The first half of the Ten Commandments, as you know, are about dealing with God and the second half, roughly half, are about dealing with each other. And so Paul echoes Jesus here.

He says, all the commandments about how to treat each other can be summed up with the one commandment to love your neighbour as yourself. See, love is at the heart of the law. And of all things, love is the key command.

It's what the Old Testament law was originally there for, to help Israel know how to love. We heard examples of that from our first reading. And while we Christians are no longer under the Old Testament law, it is still useful and applicable in showing us how to love because we are to keep loving.

There was a guy from my old church who is sometimes hard to love. He struggles with social boundaries and will interrupt conversations and monopolise them. But he cannot drive because of his mental health issues.

[18:06] And so some friends of ours would often give him a lift home after church, which was well out of their way. And they did this after serving at church both in the morning and then in Sunday school, sorry, in the morning at Sunday school and then serving at their own evening service at night.

They would do this even though they were tired and wanted to go home and get ready for work the next day. And they did this for a couple of years actually until they moved for their own work.

You see, they never reached their quota and said, we've loved this guy enough. I'm out. Pull the ripcord. I'm bailing. No. They kept loving continually and in so doing fulfilled God's law.

And can I say, I've been encouraged to see people here who love continually. In fact, you were mentioned at the last parish council as a congregation whose love for one another has grown and can be seen.

So people do notice. It's terrific. And in so doing, you're fulfilling God's law, what he wants for his people. But the main motivation for our friends is that God had first loved him.

[19 : 12] They were responding, you see, to the mercy of God. And so too ought we. God's mercy to us in Christ is the big motivation that ought to move us to live our whole lives in worship to God.

To not be conformed to the world's ways but live God's ways like submitting willingly and loving continually. But Paul finishes this chapter with a second big motivation for living our whole lives in worship to God.

And that is Christ's return. Point four, verse 11. He says, And do this understanding the present time. Well, what is the present time? Well, the hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber because our salvation is nearer now than we first believed.

He says, Paul here begins by saying, And do this. The word this refers not just to loving continually but to everything he's said since chapter 12.

You know, serving humbly, loving unconditionally, submitting willingly, and again, loving continually. We're to do all this, he says, not just in response to God's mercy but also knowing the present time we live in.

[20 : 25] And what is this special time? Well, we saw it's that Christ is about to return. Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. Have a look at verse 12. He says, The night is nearly over.

The day is almost here, he says. The day Paul is speaking about is the day of Christ's return when the world will be judged and put right and we will get to enjoy our salvation in full, in paradise.

And Paul says, The time we live in, this present time, is the time when Christ's return is close. It's certainly closer now than when we first became a Christian. In fact, he says, The night time of this present age with its evil and suffering is almost gone.

And the day of God's glorious kingdom in all its fullness is almost here. I'm not sure if you've ever seen a morning sunrise over the water. But just before the sun rises, there's this golden glow on the horizon, like on that slide there.

And when you see that glow, you know that the night is nearly gone completely and the day is almost here fully. And that's what Paul is saying here.

[21 : 36] We live in the present time where there is a glow on the horizon. Jesus has died and risen. The gospel is going out to the nations. And so the very next big thing on God's agenda is the return of Christ.

And because it's the very next big thing on God's agenda, then this present age is nearly over. Christ with his kingdom is almost here. Of course, it may feel like this day is taking forever to arrive fully.

But as the Bible reminds us, and to Peter on the next slide, I think it is, a day is like a thousand years for God, a thousand years like a day. In other words, time is relative.

We think in terms of life spans, but God thinks in terms of eternity. It's relative. It may seem like a long time for us, but it's not for God.

What's more, as we see in the second paragraph, God is not slowing keeping his promise. No, no. He's actually being patient, giving time for more people to turn to Jesus and enjoy God's mercy.

[22 : 39] But Christ will return. It's the next big thing on God's agenda. And so we're to be dressed ready for it. Do you see the rest of verse 12? He says, So let us put aside or put off the deeds of darkness and instead put on the armor of light.

Let us behave decently as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality or debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Here we're told to put off something and to put on something. It's like what Paul said at the beginning of chapter 12. Do not be conformed to the world's ways but instead be transformed to live God's ways.

And so verse 12, we had to put off the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Or verse 13, we're to behave properly as people do generally in the daytime and not like what people generally do at night.

Things like excessive revelry and drunkenness, sexual immorality and sensuality, rivalry and jealousy. Or verse 14, the other contrast, we're to clothe ourselves with Christ and not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

[23 : 55] In fact, that last bit is literally make no room for the desires of the flesh. don't even give them a chance to express themselves, to indulge themselves.

And this means not even putting ourselves in situations where we'll be tempted. We are all different and so we'll all feel different temptations more than others. But whatever it is, we're not to even give our sinful desires an opportunity to give in to temptation.

For one guy I know, he stopped reading the books and watching this TV series called Game of Thrones because in his words, it was basically soft pornography. For a female, it was a TV series Outlander which she called soft porn for women.

Her words. In our over-sexualized society, these sorts of shows and books are only going to continue. So we need to be careful. For others, it was stop watching even a simple show like Better Homes and Gardens because after each show, they would feel like their perfectly adequate home was no longer adequate.

And so they stopped watching it. For others, they limited themselves to how much sport or exercise they did because they knew it could easily become their God. You see, we all have sinful desires and Paul's point is whatever they are, don't give them even an opportunity to express themselves, to give in to temptation.

[25 : 20] Instead, clothe ourselves with Christ. So we are to wear Christ's thoughts in our minds, wear our values in his hearts, wear our actions in our, wear his actions in our lives.

We are to be completely clothed in Christ. And how does that work? Well, it's by doing all the things you know we are supposed to do. Reading the Bible, coming to church regularly.

In Colossians 3, Paul says, let the word of Christ dwell richly in us. It's hard to let the word of Christ dwell richly if we're not reading the word of Christ, if we're not meeting with his people regularly.

And why are we to clothe ourselves in Christ? Well, because we belong to the daytime. We belong to the daytime of Christ's kingdom, not the nighttime of this world. And so we are to wear clothes appropriate for the daytime, appropriate for God's kingdom.

I mean, at night you generally wear your PJs, don't you? But when the day arrives, you put them off because they are nighttime clothes. And hopefully you don't just put off your PJs, you put something else on before you go to work.

[26 : 31] So also you're to put something appropriate on for the day you're about to have. So too here, we are to put off the clothes of the world and put on the clothes of Christ because they are the clothes appropriate for his kingdom, for the day that is about to arrive with Christ's return.

Michelle is returning in five days, nine hours and 19 minutes. I can't wait.

But because she's not here, do I act as though I have no wife? Do I act as though I belong to no one and put my name down on the dating website, start visiting other churches? Of course not.

We are still married and what's more, she is about to return. And so I live as though I belong to her and look forward to that day when my world will be put right and my salvation from the kids will come in full.

That's a joke. Sort of. More seriously though, although Jesus is not physically here, we still belong to him, don't we?

[27 : 41] He is still spiritually with us. What's more, he is about to return in God's timing, of course, not our timing. But either way, we are to live as people who belong to him and his coming kingdom.

We are to look forward to his return, then we will enjoy our salvation in full paradise. So on the next slide, the last slide, you have these two big motivations to keep living in worship to God, to keep working and not being conformed to this world, but being transformed into Christ-likeness.

The first motivation is the start of chapter 12, in view of God's mercy. Let that move you, keep remembering that. And the second is at the end of chapter 13, in view of Christ's imminent return, and between our examples of how to live in worship to God.

It's not always easy to do though, so we're to keep looking back to the cross and see God's mercy, that we might be moved to keep worshipping him. and we're to look forward to Christ's return and our glory, where it will all be made worthwhile, that we'll be motivated to keep living like him.

So may we keep living in view of God's past mercy and Christ's future return. Let's pray we would. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you so much for your past mercy in us, for us, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[29 : 02] Indeed, we thank you for your ongoing mercy to us in this present time. Father, we also thank you for the future return of Christ as well. Father, we ask that you would help us to keep reflecting on these profound truths, that we might be moved and motivated to keep living in worship to you, not just on Sundays, but every day.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.