

Together in Christ

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0:00] Just over a week ago now, I completed my 57th lap of the sun! I was born on the 29th of August 1969.

And in the moment that I was born, I became a son and a brother at exactly the same time.

That is the means becoming one was the exact same means becoming the other. My parents had another son just under two years before me.

And so when I was born, my parents gained a second son and my older brother gained a brother.

And so those first two years of his life were probably the best he's ever had.

I couldn't have become a son without also becoming a brother. It was a package deal. Being born to my parents also meant having their oldest son as my brother.

[1:04] No ifs, no buts. And something very similar happens when a person is born again when someone is united to Christ Jesus.

We don't get Christ without getting all those who are united to Christ. Joining him also means being joined to others who are joined to him.

It's a package deal. And so that's what we're unpacking today. If you've got the St. Paul's app in front of you, you'll see I've got three points.

We're turning to Romans 12 and the first thing we notice in Romans 12 is what life in Christ, what is it that God calls us to as his people?

Romans 1 to 11 is a detailed description of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. And then Romans 12, which was just read out to us, opens with the word therefore.

[2:12] Therefore. In other words, Paul is now moving to unpack the implications of Romans 1 to 11.

And the first two verses are the summary of the whole Christian life. The first two verses. This is what it means to be in Christ.

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.

There are two central features of living life in Christ. And the first one is in verse one, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.

So what Paul does here, this would have been a familiar image for those in the first century. I mean, this was written. He's picking up the idea of the Old Testament temple worship, where you would go and you would offer a whole burnt offering.

[3:23] That's the image here. And the whole burnt offering was an animal without defect. In other words, it was the best animal, the first animal in your flock.

And so to be a living sacrifice is, to cut it all short, really, in summary, is to be fully at God's disposal. And it's a living sacrifice. Not a dead sacrifice. Living, which means it's a constantly being at God's disposal fully.

It means to obey God in anything that he calls us to in any area of life and to thank him for anything that he sends in any area of life.

Constantly, fully at God's disposal. Jesus says exactly the same thing in Luke chapter 9, where he says, A life fully at God's disposal is what verse 1 calls our true and proper worship.

[4:41] The original language here, the word is logical worship. This is your logical.

A life fully given over, a living sacrifice is your logical worship. That is, it's a rational, logical response to Romans 1 to 11.

And all that God has done for us in Jesus, his mercy towards us. And in fact, the word is saying that anything less than total, complete sacrifice of the self to God is an illogical, an irrational response to

what Paul has just written in Romans 1 to 11.

To give ourselves partly, to give ourselves half-heartedly, is not only morally offensive, but also a failure to not think clearly or to understand God's mercy.

And that's why the second central feature of life in Christ is a call to think clearly. Verse 2, Life in Christ means having our minds inflamed with the truth of Christ, so it fires the imagination, shapes the heart, and controls our living.

[6:25] And this happens through the spirit of God working through the word of God in such a way that we see God's mercy to us in Jesus Christ more and more and more and more and more.

And we will see it as we offer ourselves to God more and more and more and more and more.

Knowledge of God's mercy and experience of God's mercy go together.

We don't experience God's sacrifice for us without sacrificing ourselves to him. When we contemplate God more and more in his word, we start to also get a right view of ourselves.

Verse 3 says we ought not to think too highly of ourselves. Rather than our self-overinflated view of ourselves, God's mercy leads to us to think of ourselves with sober judgment, which the word sober there means to have an accurate view of self.

That is, the person in Christ ought not to have too high of yourself because the gospel tells us that we are saved by grace and grace alone.

[7:55] We contribute nothing to it. That's what we've been unpacking in these last number of weeks, entirely the work of Christ. Nor should we have too low of ourselves because Christ was willing to save us and embrace us and love us and affirm us and approve of us.

And this gospel transformation is essential because too high a view of self means we don't think we need anyone else serving us.

We don't think we've got gaps. Too low a view of ourselves means that we don't think we've got anything to offer anyone else.

And so we won't serve others. And all of this matters because a life lived in Christ and for Christ is a life lived together in Christ and for Christ.

When God draws people to himself in Christ, he is drawing his people to each other in Christ.

[9:13] When he saves, he gathers. And we cannot come to Christ without coming to his people.

We don't get him without him. Life in Christ is life together in Christ. And that's challenging for us.

Particularly for those of us with a Western mindset, but not just the Western mindset. You see, one of the main features of Western culture is individualism. The modern form of individualism, it started back in the 17th century with the French philosopher René Descartes.

What he attempted to do was... What he attempted to do was... He attempted to defend the existence of God.

And he started his defence of the existence of God with these words in summary form. I think, therefore I am.

[10:27] That's Descartes. I think, therefore I am. And that statement there kicked off a trend in Western civilisation that starts all the answers to life's big questions with...

I. I. I. Everything is defined in relation to me. That makes me the basic unity of...

unit of reality. It begins with me. And we approach Christianity in the same way. Christianity is so much more than just a personal relationship with God.

Where he loves you and he has a wonderful plan for your life. Christianity is so much more than that. And if it was just simply...

God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life... It would just be okay... Just to open your laptop... Sit in bed on a Sunday morning and watch a live stream.

[11:54] It'd be okay just to do that. If that's all it was. This is a major problem for us, this concept.

Because in the 2021 census... 43.9% of Australians identified themselves as Christian. 43.9%.

And yet, only 4.5% of those identified as Christian... also identified that they went to church. There's a major, major problem with those statistics.

Because you cannot be Christian and not have his church. Being in Christ means we come to know God as our Father. Which also means coming to know his people as our brothers and sisters.

And so the very first implication... that Paul lays out here in living life... in Christ... is... he says...

[12:59] brothers and sisters. Brothers and sisters. Being in Christ means... being part of others who are also in him.

Notice how strong the language of our togetherness is. Verses 4 and 5. For just as each of us has one body with many members... and these members do not have all the same function... so in Christ we, though many, form one body... and each member belongs to all the others. Christ... God has ordered the church... in the same way that he's ordered the human body. To be interdependent... and so that we belong to each other... and we need each other. Church is not a group... of people that we attend... but a body that we belong to. It's impossible... to be in Christ... and not belong... to his people. A Christian has a connection with...

[13:57] and a responsibility to... other Christians. You cannot claim... Christ... and avoid his people. And this was the insight...

that was burned... into the heart of the Apostle Paul... at his very first encounter with Jesus. When Jesus appeared to Paul...

on the Damascus Road in Acts 9... Paul... was on his way... a deeply religious man... was on his way to systematically... destroy the church...

and to stamp out Christianity. And Jesus... confronts him... and his words to Paul... were stunning... and life-changing.

He says to Paul... why do you persecute me? I am Jesus... whom you are persecuting.

[15:01] See the connection? See the connection? in persecuting the church... Paul is persecuting Jesus. That's how tight...

his relationship is... with his people. What you do to Jesus... sorry... what you do to the church... you do to Jesus. And the implication is huge...

when you think about the church. If we fail to serve... the body of Christ... we fail to serve Christ. If we treat them... how we treat them... how we treat them...

neglecting the church... is neglecting Jesus. Hardening our heart... to Christ's people... is hardening our hearts... to Christ. God has designed...

his saved people... to function... and grow together... in Christ. When God saves a person... he also gifts them... with abilities... to serve Christ...

[16:03] in his church... for our transformation. Everything that God... desires of us... gets done together. Verses 6 to 8...

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 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. Now... notice something... really significant here.

The list here... and there is a... there's several lists... in the New Testament. The list here... alternates between... two categories... of gifts.

Items 1, 3 and 4... are prophesied... teaching and exhorting... are gifts of speech. Items 2, 5 and 6... serving, giving, leading... and showing mercy...

[16:59] are gifts of... leading people... of meeting needs. And it alternates... between those two gifts... two categories...

and it is therefore... implying... that there's no thought... of superiority... over others. They're all needed... together.

together. However much... these gifts might... differ in terms of activity... or profile... within the church... all the gifts...

are of equal... dignity... and of importance. And the... really the only question... is whether we... properly use the gift... that we've received. You see... notice that Paul... doesn't just... make a list of... gifts. He goes all Nike on us.

[17:58] Just do it. You see it again there? Again... just do it. If it's... you've got the gift of leading... lead! Do it! Do it! Do it! Do it!

Every single Christian... by virtue of coming... to Christ... has been gifted... to serve God's people... from the moment...

that you are in Christ. And so... all of us need to be considering... how we serve. And the attitude here... is an attitude...

to gather to serve... not to be served... just as Jesus himself... united himself to us... to serve... and not to be served.

Mark 10:45. Now... suppose... this is a church... where... you can be... confident...
 [18:55] of receiving... gospel ministry... um... but our desire... as a church... is also to be a church... where every... every Christian learns...
 how to... ministry... to work together... to be a church... to build each other up...
 for the glory of God... and for the good of our neighbourhood. And the rest of this chapter... tells us... that the gifts of Christ... must...
 also be accompanied... with the character of Christ. In the other two places... in the New Testament... Ephesians 4... and 1 Corinthians 12... Paul says...
 exactly the same thing... as he does here... in Ephesians 4... list of gifts... God gives the church... Paul starts... the chapter... Ephesians 4...
 [19:50] with urging them... to do as he does here... at the beginning of Romans 12... and to live lives... because of what... they've received in Jesus. He mentions...
 lives of humility... and gentleness... and patience... and bearing one another... and he ends... the section of gifts... by saying... speaking the truth... in love... we will grow... to become... in every respect...
 the mature body of him... who is the head... that is Christ... from him... the whole body... joined... and held together... by every supporting ligament...
 grows... and builds itself up... in love... as each part... does its work. 1 Corinthians 12... it's a whole chapter... on the diversity... and the unity... of the church...
 and the spiritual gifts... that God has given... the church... in order to build... that unity... in love... and... 1 Corinthians 12...
 [20:45] which is an extensive chapter... with all the details... about the giftedness... and the unity... of the church... is followed... immediately... with the most...
 famous passage... in the Bible... on... love... and he says... let me show you... the most excellent way... and it makes the point...
 that gifting... without love... does damage... it doesn't build up... it destroys... and so the same thing...
 is happening here... in verses 9 to 21... I'm not going to unpack it all... what we have here... is a brief catalogue... of... 20 instructions...
 regarding the way... God's people... should relate... to one another... and the summary of it all... is love... your love...
 [21:43] must be... sincere... that's how it starts... and this is what... sincere love looks like... verse 10... to be devoted...
 to one another... in brotherly love... love... the second half... of that verse... love puts others first... and we are to honour... one another... above ourselves... to honour someone...
 is to treat them... as valuable... they are... they are value... because they're made... in the image of God... because they have the spirit... of God dwelling in them... and each person... is precious as important... in the body... the essence of love...
 is not to concentrate... on your own image... your own position... your own needs... your own gifts... your own rights... love is doing... whatever it takes... to give people...
 whatever they need... it is a living sacrifice... of emotion... of action... and of rights... and crucially...
 [22:41] in John 13... 35... Jesus says... that love for one another... is the defining mark... of being his disciple... another reason...
 another reason... why... you can't have... Christ... without his people... don't... tell me... you love Christ... if you do not love...
 his people... you don't have Christ... and you need to know... the love of Christ... a very significant part...
 of the church's impact... on the world... will be the quality... of the relationship... between its members... a quality of relationship... is found nowhere else... in the world...
 a church loving each other... that displays... the beauty of Jesus... see the church... functioning like this... together... with all its diversity... but building each other...
 [23:41] up in love... makes the gospel visible... to our world... so how do we...
 how do we do that... where do we get the power... in order... that we might... live this life... because it's massive...

what's being said here... what's saying here is... that... according... according to Romans 12... based on what...

he has just outlined... in Romans 1 to 11... being part of the church... is more important... than anything else...

let me just let that... for a little bit... there might be reasons...

[24:42] why you're not here... on a Sunday... such as you're giving birth... or... your spouse is giving birth... or...

the atheist Richard Dawkins... has just called you... and said... I need you to come... and pray with me... and my plane leaves... in 20 minutes... maybe that might be... a reason why... but there are... very few things... that ought to ever... get in the way of it... where do we get the power... to have our... minds renewed...

so that we see... the church... as Christ sees the church... we've already seen it... it's right there... in view of God's mercy...

you see... God's mercy to us... is that in Jesus Christ... a Christian is fully accepted... and loved as dearly... as he loves us...

[25:51] sorry... he loves Jesus... God's mercy to us... is more than just... our sins... it's actually been brought... into the dynamic...

of God... and Holy Spirit... his mercy... is to bring us... back to him... and so now...

in Jesus... everything that belongs... to Jesus... belongs... to the Christian... and to the degree...

that we look to... and embrace... God's mercy to us... in the gospel...

of Jesus Christ... is to the degree... that we will offer... ourselves... up to God... and to each other... we need to look...

to the one... who... who surrendered... himself... utterly... for us... we need to see... we need to see...

[26:53] Jesus Christ... as Philippians 2... tells us... in very nature... God... but did not use it... for his own advantage... for all of eternity... he existed in perfect... joy...

and service... and love... with the... with the Father... and the Spirit... a dynamic... constantly... pouring each other... into the life... constantly... for all of eternity...

and then... he left it... he left it... and entered... his creation... as a man...

its limitations... he went from... perfect relationship... to being despised... and he put himself... in that moment... at the Father's disposal...

he obediently... and willingly... made himself... nothing... he became... a servant... he gave himself... wholly to us... and for us...

[27:49] he died... as a sacrifice... for sin... once... and for all... so that we... might become... living sacrifices... his body...

was destroyed... on the cross... under the horror... of God's anger... so that we... could offer... our bodies... to bring pleasure...

to God... he was rejected... as his Father... turned away... from him... on the cross... so that we... could come to God... and be embraced... welcomed...

into the dynamic... relationship... of love... and joy... that he'd always known... with the Father... and the Spirit... the only way...

to sustain... a life of service... of God... and others... is to consistently... our heart... kindle... our heart...

[28:47] with God's mercy... to consistently... be gazing... at God's mercy... to us... in Jesus... and to know... that in Jesus... God... is pleased...

with me... kindle... your heart... with... the knowledge... that he loves you... that he approves... of you... and when we... kindle that heart... start to see... that that's something... that's not happening... by myself... that my church...

is vital for me... to have my heart... kindled in that way... I cannot have my heart... kindled with... for Christ... without Christ's people... your church...

needs you... to kindle... their hearts... as well... you can't have Christ... without his church... you cannot serve Christ... without serving his church...

[29:48] you cannot love Christ... without loving his people... many years ago... in ministry... I've been in ministry...

for over three decades... and a consistent thing... that I used to hear... amongst pastors... and something that I used to say... on a regular basis... myself... unfortunately... was... church would be great... if it wasn't for the people... you know... ministry would be fantastic... if it wasn't for the people... I've... I've actually... shifted my thinking... over the last... three to four years... or so... and... I got to say it... in front of a bunch of ministers... the other day... they asked me... how church is... and I said... church would be great... if it wasn't for me... great if it wasn't for me... that what I find is...

[30:45] my struggle... with church... is my heart... that wants independence... it's my heart... that wants to be served... and so...

in closing... I just want to say... in leading this church... for 17 years now... if I was to leave right now... my overwhelming sense...

would be... I'm not by the way... my overwhelming sense... would be... thank you... thank you... because...

I would not be... who I am in Christ... without you... I need you... as much as you need me... thank you...