

Everything for Christ

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[0 : 0 0] Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve. If it is teaching, let him teach. If it is encouraging, let him encourage. If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously. If it is leadership, let him govern diligently. If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. This is the word of the Lord.

Thank you, Lord. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you have come amongst us as a man, the creator God of the universe, and we thank you that you have laid down your life for our sins, and we thank you that in power your Father has raised you to life, never to die again. And we pray, Lord, that as we come to your word now, that we would sit under your lordship, that we would marvel at who you are, that we would be in submission to you, and that each one of us, Lord, that you would be leading us in your truth and growing us in Christ from the place where we are. Meet us in your word now, speak to us powerfully by your spirit, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Some of you will have seen Peter Jensen, our Archbishop on Q&A; on the ABC last Monday night. You can see it online if you missed it. He engaged in a very difficult debate with one woman in particular who unashamedly declared herself atheist. And it was an intimidating struggle between outspoken unbelief and unapologetic faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And it wasn't merely a battle of intellect and reason, it was a spiritual battle that required considerable grace and wisdom in seeking a hearing on issues where people were not eager to listen. Sam preached on Romans 1 a few weeks ago, and he showed us that when we reject God, we choose a miserable path which is deathly. So Romans chapter 128 says, furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They're full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, boastful. And they invent ways of doing evil. They disobey their parents. They're senseless, faithless, heartless, heartless, ruthless. And although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but also to approve of those who practice them. And it defies reason. People will choose death over life. And in this bizarre manifestation of evil, that people actually get comfort of taking other people to death with them.

We've had a great time in Romans. It explains God's gospel in the most magnificent way, and it's God's response to our deathly situation. The first eight chapters address many issues, God's anger with people, with men and women, why his judgment is just, why trying to keep the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Old Testament law can't make us good enough for God. It tells us why faith pleases God and how true peace and joy come through faith in Jesus Christ. Helps us to make sense of our ongoing struggle with sin.

[5 : 29] And then in chapter 8, verse 1, this magnificent expression of God's mercy, that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And at the end of chapter 8, verse 39, that nothing, nothing at all in the entire universe is able to separate us from the love of Christ Jesus.

And so in Christ, we have received extraordinary mercy from God. Chapters 9 to 11, they're a bit different, they're really substantial, but they're like an excursus or an excursion into the place of the Jews in God's plan of salvation. But chapter 12 brings us to where I'm preaching today and it begins with these words. And I'm not going to get past these two verses.

Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, and then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will. I heard the great British Bible teacher, John Stott, preach on this passage. In my early days of being a believer, he spoke to an Easter service at the University of New South Wales just before the Billy Graham crusade in 1979. And he explained that the therefore is a terribly important little word, it's a turning point in the letter, it is a hinge. Everything that's gone before in Romans links now to what follows. It's where the rubber hits the road. We move from theory to practice, from what the good news is to how the good news transforms the lives of people who believe the gospel.

God's action brings transformation. And so he says, therefore I urge you, brethren, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual act of worship. That's the NIV.

God's disposition towards us, God's disposition towards people is one of mercy. And it's a particular type of mercy, it's gut-wrenching pity and compassion. God knows the predicament that we're in, he knows our predicament better than we see it for ourselves and he responds to it with his gut-wrenching pity and compassion. I actually think chapter 12 verse 1 picks up from Romans 8, 38, 39.

[8 : 25] For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. So the first eight chapters of Romans reach this crescendo in the unquenchable love of God which is shown to his people.

And it's the most amazing thing that God loves his creation and his heart goes out in pity and compassion to his people. And then he says to us, in view of God's love, in view of God's mercy, in view of God's compassion, offer yourselves, offer your bodies as living sacrifices.

Now the people he's writing to are very familiar with animal sacrifices. They wouldn't have been shocked by some of the animal videos on our television when animals are slaughtered in Indonesia and other places. Whether it was the temple in Jerusalem or the meat markets in Rome, animals were slaughtered ritually and in the name of their God all the time. People saw animals killed, they saw where their food came from. And people were also used to the idea of substitution, an animal sacrificed in place of you. Not a bad deal. Not such a great life to be a sacrificial animal. You don't choose to be a sacrifice. Someone chooses you. Your body is put on the line for others. Your throat is cut and your body is burnt. The animal dies a death representative of the death that we deserve. Romans chapter 5 and 8 speak about Jesus' death as a sacrifice.

In chapter 8 verse 3 it says, For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.

And Romans 12 verse 1 tells us that the only appropriate response to what God has done is to become a sacrifice. Fortunately for us it's a living sacrifice. It's a whole of life commitment.

[11 : 24] I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship.

When I became a believer I was 18, about to turn 19. And I was already attending church. And within a few months of coming to Christ I joined a group that met in a friend's house. two-bedroom cottage, fibro cottage.

Hardly a small group. And we worked through Luke's gospel verse by verse for a year. The groove was quite a contrast to church.

We had a loving pastor dressed in black, just like Brian was this morning. See Brian this morning? Full collar, boy. And he smoked a pipe He was known as Puffing Billy.

[12 : 53] But he was absolutely committed to seeing people saved. And at the same time he was very stern. He was formal. He was a pretty lousy preacher.

We had a sung robed choir. Members walked in every Sunday night at 7.15 wearing their academic hoods. We had boring sermons.

Chanted responses. I liked going but I grew and was nurtured in the house church. The leaders loved Jesus and his word.

And they were really careful to try to teach it truthfully. and they worked hard at submitting to what they were learning. And so for me in the same place two very different experiences of Christians gathering to worship.

In the house church we began to study this passage in Romans. This is year two. Year one was Luke. Year two was Romans. Took us all year. And we got to chapter 12 verse 1 Therefore I urge you brethren in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God this is your spiritual act of worship.

[14 : 17] And it was really difficult for me because I had been taught that worship was what you did on Sunday and you might have been taught that too. Some of our younger people may well just think that worship is singing because it's used like that as well.

But this passage that we are in this morning talks about the whole of life as worship. Everything that we do whether we're here in church this morning or outside somewhere through the week everything that we do is a response to who God is.

And I remember going to the rector to talk about it because I was confused and it threw it up for me and he said to me don't worry about it my boy church on Sunday is true worship.

All these other groups well they're then things they're okay but they're not true worship. Church on Sunday is where you need to be. Well of course you need to be at church on Sunday it's a great place to gather with God's people and encourage one another.

And I've spent a lot of time wrestling with that over the years. I gave you verbatim of what he said. I loved him and he's with the Lord now but I think he was wrong and I think he was wrong in two ways.

[15 : 38] Both those gatherings of Christ's church were true and valid expressions of devotion to Jesus. One of them was very formal and the other was very informal.

Both involved believers coming together to encourage each other in Christ and learn from his word both involved worship or service.

And the second error is to define worship narrowly as merely coming to church on Sunday. and a group or two through the week.

Romans chapter 12 verse 1 says it is a whole of life commitment a whole of life response to Christ a whole of life response to the gospel. And listen to the force of these words I urge you I implore you the great apostle pushes his point to the max in view of God's mercy in view of God's gospel in view of Romans chapter 1 to Romans chapter 11 in view of what God has done we must respond.

He has brought us from death to life if we have put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ he has forgiven everything. He's wiped away sexual indiscretion he's taken our lies he's taken our unfaithfulness he's dealt with our dishonest dealings he's working on our hate everything that gets in the way of us relating to him Christ has dealt with at the cross and you see that this mercy of God is just enormous and so in Christ we have a new beginning this is God's momentous news and it's great news for anybody who is humble enough to listen and to respond absolutely liberating God deals with our sins he sets us free.

[17 : 53] Twelve chapters of Romans is summarised by three verses in Ephesians so if you want to learn Romans chapter 1 to 12 off by heart go to Ephesians chapter 2 8 to 10 for it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this not from yourselves it is the gift of God not by works so that no one can boast for we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do so God saved us and now there is much that we can do for him we enter into the king's service we are his Romans chapter 6 describes this as becoming a slave to a new master we're all slaves the issue is who is your master and so our spiritual act of worship that's the

NIV again or service is total it's whole of life it's nothing more it's nothing less it's not about bottoms on seats on Sunday it's about living for Jesus choosing to live Jesus way making conscious decisions day by day moment by moment to do and respond to what Jesus wants and not what we are naturally inclined to do we will have all carry different burdens and struggles to this morning how do we honour Christ in the midst of those struggles what does it mean to trust him what does it mean to be faithful to him therefore I urge you brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God this is your spiritual act of worship and I want to come back to that

I want to say to you that spiritual act of service which is what the NIV has is a very unhelpful translation because it actually says this is your logical act of worship this is your reasonable act of worship it is the most reasonable it is the most rational thing to do and it's really interesting because I think we ought to be about feelings and emotions it ought to be part of our worship and who we are in Christ but it is really clear that this is much more than feeling good about the gospel Paul has taken pages and pages and chapters and chapters to explain his gospel and now in one verse he calls us to good thinking God does not ask us to throw away our minds to believe in him we are to use our minds and to see that the most logical response to what God has done is to give ourselves to him he's proved his love respond to it it defies logic not to atheism works furiously to deny God and do you know what they have to because if

God is as good as the scriptures say he is then we are absolute fools to reject him the other part of this passage says do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind and then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good perfect and pleasing will see the minds are still in action in the second verse as well conformed or transformed the words presume that the usual ways conformity to be pressed or moulded into the ways of the world the word is age it's not world conformed to the ways of this age there's a contrast between this age in which we live in the age which is yet to come when Christ will be seen as king and the bible's very clear that we live in an age which is coming to an end it is temporary we become resident aliens with visitor permits old christian song is right when it says that this world is not our home we are only visiting this planet we are temporary residents of this age and we are heirs of the age to come we still live with the pressure of life here we see the same media we're subject to the same temptations as everybody else is subject to

I think it's foolish to pretend that we're not drawn by sin and affected by sin it's better to be honest than not to hide our struggles and too many christians get caught out saying one thing and living completely differently it's hypocrisy which brings shame on the name of the lord jesus so the gospel calls us to break with our past to reject conformity to be transformed in our minds to be transformed in our thinking to think differently the ongoing transformation is envisaged it's not like we just arrived we don't have to do anything anymore this is ongoing the work of christy spirit in our lives the christian life is a journey where we are constantly learning how to think differently romans chapter 8 talks about mindset verse 5 those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires but those who live in accordance with the spirit have their minds set on what the spirit desires transformed is a wonderful word in the original language it's the word that we get metamorphosis from so to be transformed is to be metamorphosed the caterpillar spins its cocoon goes to sleep and it goes through the process of metamorphosis it changes it emerges from the cocoon transformed into the most magnificent moths and butterflies it's changed from a creature that crawls on its belly to a creature that flies it goes through radical regeneration same word is used of the lord jesus when he's transfigured in his heavenly form the disciples get a glimpse of his heavenly glory when we become christians the change begins it begins in our minds it begins with a change in thought a change in thinking a change in attitude towards god and towards his son the lord jesus christ but it moves beyond that and paul urges us to allow our minds to dwell in good places so philippians chapter 4 finally brothers and sisters whatever is true whatever is noble whatever is right whatever is pure whatever is lovely whatever is admirable if anything is excellent or praiseworthy think about such things our minds are renewed as we let them dwell in healthy places and as our minds change we too change from people crawling through the mud of life into beautiful new creatures beginning to learn to fly

[26 : 05] I experienced distorted thinking yesterday probably in a fairly insubstantial way but it was just on my mind in terms of the message for this morning but we had a wonderful day here yesterday with community group leader training we were here a lot of the morning the afternoon and I went home after what felt like a big day and it felt like a really good day and a God blessed day and I thought I'll watch a movie and relax for a while you've earned a break but the movie affected my mood and my thinking in a really unhelpful way and it wasn't sex or drugs or alcohol or anything awful it was just awful and by the time I finished watching which was a mistake you know my feelings were affected by what I'd given my mind to in a way that made the whole day feel terrible still don't understand it

I'll tell you afterwards what it was so you don't watch it probably probably if I tell you what it was you all sit there nodding yeah did that to me too tell you later really dear brother challenged me the other day from his own life and he said he's been recognizing similar things in himself he's actually been recognizing that when he thinks in particular ways it has an impact on relationships around him and his whole disposition and this is not just about positive thinking stuff this is about trying to be and live in submission to Christ and so he is consciously working to recognize that when he starts to think negatively especially in his marriage and with issues towards his wife he prays in that moment that God would take it from him he prays that God would take it from him and in Christ he is striving to think differently and it is helping his relationships another friend once said to me think the best about someone before you presume the worst

I think I know it for myself and you will too you know you can actually go into a brain spiral can't you can think something terrible like just take your spouse or your kids or something and you go all negative on it and it goes down and down and down and by the time you're finished you are in a real mess and the way that you got yourself into that mess was by the way you thought your thoughts took you there your mind affected your whole body's disposition those who live in accordance with the spirit have their mind set on what the spirit desires be transformed by the renewing of your mind and then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good pleasing and perfect will so coming to

Christ is the beginning but now that we are his and I hope that that's many of us sitting here in church this morning the change continues as we are prepared for life in the age to come and much of the change and the transformation begins with our minds what we think heard a lovely little story about a little girl I still don't know if this is true or not but church service one Sunday the collection plate went around and it came to the little girl and she took it in her hand she put it on the floor and she stood in it and when the sides person said what's she doing she said well in Sunday school I learned that I was supposed to give myself to God got the point of the passage applied it maybe a little too concretely but got the point therefore I urge you brothers and sisters in view of

God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God this is your logical act of worship do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind and then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good pleasing and perfect will God's will is his God's will is his God's will is his God's will is his God's will is his services that where John and Leslie Hicks live down the road and a few others and I think there's a huge link between what we've been doing in Romans 8 1 and what we've been looking at this morning in Romans 12 1 because in Romans 8 1 and then at the end the gospel declares there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and what that means is we stand under the mercy of God the judge of all the earth has taken condemnation right away from us and we have this magnificent experience of his mercy and we are told that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ which is in Christ Jesus our

[31 : 45] Lord we are recipients of phenomenal mercy mercy and so you get the 12 one in view of this mercy in view of God's mercy live for Christ your whole life everywhere you go everything you do everything you think and we applied it the other day and we thought you know renewed minds leads to renewed relationships and one of the greatest things that we've received is this experience of mercy from God's hand towards ourselves and he has put in our hands the ability to extend undeserved mercy in all sorts of relationships that we find ourselves in and I want to say let's begin at home in the relationships which are closest to us but move out from there because we know that in our families sometimes we carry deep hurt and wounds whether it be our immediate family or families which are a bit further out God has given us in Christ the tools to be full of mercy to one another just as we have received it for ourselves in Christ let's pray Lord Jesus we pray that you would help help us to see our whole life as yours and we do struggle with sin in this age with weakness and failure and sometimes grave error in our own lives but we experience it Lord in the hope of the enormous mercy that you have shown us in Christ and we pray that just as you are transforming us that we would be transformed in the way that we relate to those around us especially to those who are near us in Christ even within our own families please transform us Lord

Jesus individually and corporately as the people of God that your name would be glorified in everything we do and we pray this in Jesus precious name Amen