

# God and the Church

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Date: 07 August 2022

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, everyone. My name is James. It's nice to be with you this morning. Let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, I thank you for your word to us. Thank you for that part of Romans 12, which Flora has just read.

Be with us this morning as we look at your word for us today. Amen. There is a man here whose insecurity causes him to question his place before God.

And so he acts to please people and to please God. There's a sister here who questions her value and feels the need to talk herself up in front of other people and before God.

There's a mom here who sees her sin and thinks that she is the very worst mom. And she's constantly comparing herself to others. And there's a brother here who feels that God is so awesome and is so good that God is demanding more and more of him.

And he feels like he should be doing more as a Christian, but ends up feeling guilty. We have a distorted view of God. And it distorts our view of ourselves and our relationship with other people.

[ 1 : 14 ] One of my temptations, one of the things that I do personally is that it can lead me to, my view of myself can lead me to question my value.

It can lead me to think, does God really want me? Do people actually want to hang out with me? Do my friends really want to hang out to me? Or am I just a burden on them? We are in the book of Romans.

We're in a series called Made New and we're up to chapter 12. We've seen over the last number of weeks how good God has been. That God shows his goodness and his love and mercy to a people who are undeserving.

And now we see at the start of chapter 12, the first word that Flora read for us before was therefore. Therefore, what is the impact of all that God has done through us in Jesus?

How does it change our lives? Paul is going to start with our relationships with God. And then our view of ourselves and then others. Because we have a distorted view of our God.

[ 2 : 24 ] And it impacts all of our relationships. And the challenge will be today to see how when we have a clear view of our relationship with God, it helps us to see ourselves right.

And it shapes every relationship we have. There are three points this morning that you'll be able to find in the St. Paul's app. And if you don't have that app, you can scan the QR code in front of you. The three points, new life, a new view of ourselves and new service. But I'm going to spend the majority of our time together on that first point. Those first two verses, I was tempted to just preach on just those two verses.

Because I think it has so much there for us. I'm going to spend the majority of our time in those first two verses before I quickly move through the second and third point. So have Romans 12 open with you this morning on a phone or in your Bible.

Be taking notes. That is good for us. This passage starts with that word that I mentioned, therefore. And you always need to question what the therefore is.

[ 3 : 31 ] Therefore. Paul has told us about the good news which comes to a people who don't deserve it. How we can totally trust in God, the one who makes salvation possible.

And now he says, therefore. Because of God's great love for you, therefore. Because of salvation by faith, therefore. Because of justification by grace alone, therefore.

Live differently. The next two verses, verse 1 and 2, are a summary of the entire Christian life following all that God has done in these last 11 chapters.

So, verse 1. 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. Therefore, because of all that Paul has said about what God has done, live a radical life as a Christian.

[ 4 : 40 ] And the motivation is God's mercy. It's the only sufficient motivation for a life of gratitude. Back in Romans 8, Paul argued that a Christian cannot lose their salvation.

And so mercy and grace is our only motivation to have a radically different life. If a Christian could lose their salvation, then our motivation would be fear or guilt.

I'm not living right. I'm not living as God wants me to. I need to work harder so I can make sure I'm saved. And then, how does that work out in other relationships?

I feel guilty before God that I'm not working hard enough. And then I see the people around me. Well, they're still sinning. You know, I need to tell my kids. I need to tell people around you, you need to be doing better.

You need to be reading your Bible more. Aren't you worried about this sin that you're still holding on to? This is where religious guilt comes in. This inner view that I'm not accepted and loved by God and I always need to do more and more.

[ 5 : 52 ] It leads to anxiety. It leads to fear. And the person who relates to God out of fear believes that they will get what they deserve in a season.

Have you ever had that thought, you know, that kind of calmer thought? Ah, do you know what? I haven't really gone to church recently.

And, you know, I've gotten sick. I've gotten COVID. Maybe this is God punishing me because I haven't been obeying Him. Fear leads us to think that we get what we deserve in a season.

It leads to anxiety before God and other people. But this is not the gospel. God has already given us mercy. He already chooses to love us.

And so Paul encourages us that we are motivated by mercy, not by fear, not by guilt, not by needing to do anything. That's been the point of the last 11 chapters.

[ 6 : 51 ] We're motivated not by that. We're motivated by God's mercy. Live differently. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, in view of God's wonderful mercy, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your true and proper worship. Offer your body as a living sacrifice. The first call for us in view of God's mercy is to live as a living sacrifice.

Paul is using Old Testament language here of sacrifice. It's the image of a worshiper coming in and bringing an offering. It's not an offering that would deal with sin.

We already have that. That's Jesus. But this offering was a burnt offering. This was the best a person had. They would bring their very best animal, the one without blemish, the one without defect.

It was the most expensive and best they had. It was not their leftovers. And this offering was always completely burnt. And it represented a complete devotion to God.

[ 8 : 04 ] And so what Paul is saying for our lives is that we ought to be offering everything. We ought to be offering every aspect of our lives. We ought to be offering everything.

We ought to be offering everything. We ought to be offering everything. We ought to be offering everything. We ought to be offering everything. We ought to be offering everything. And he specifically mentions bodies. Now for us that might seem fairly normal, but this is into a Greco-Roman context.

And they believed that what happened in the body did not actually matter. The religious and philosophical Romans and Greeks, what they pursued was purity of the mind.

And so they thought that, you know what, what happens with the body doesn't matter. If I choose to pursue anything I like with my body, sexual depravity, it doesn't matter as long as I'm pursuing purity of the mind.

But Paul is being inclusive of everything. We are to offer everything to God as living sacrifices. We don't just divide parts of our lives out.

[ 9 : 08 ] We're not to think like the ancient Romans and Greeks and separate what happens. I'll offer some of my life, my money, my Sunday mornings to God, but I'm going to pursue the job that I want.

I'm going to pursue the sexual experiences that I want. I'll parent as I fit. Paul calls us, in view of God's mercies, to offer our bodies, our minds, our thoughts, our hopes, and our dreams to God.

God wants everything. Now it sounds a bit greedy for God to want everything. But when we remember how deep God's mercies are for us, that his mercy in Jesus, we only have anything because of God's mercy to us.

And so the most obvious response to God's mercy is to offer everything as a living sacrifice. And it's living. It's not just a once-off, I have done that.

It is a living thing. We continue to offer it. It's a daily giving. As we continue to read God's word, we are reminded of his mercy. And we continue to bring our whole lives before him.

[10:27] On Wednesday afternoon this week, of the week just past, I had to take my youngest to soccer. I know, and it's this 45-minute thing that happens on a Wednesday afternoon.

And Wednesdays, as we all know, is the worst day of the week. It's hump day. And I feel tired by five o'clock on a Wednesday. And I had to take him. And I have this 45-minute window where I thought, do you know what?

Do you know what would be really good to do right now? It would be really good to just drop Micah and then go and sit in the car and have a nap. That would be so delightful. Or maybe even read a book or just do anything I like.

That would be really good. And do you know what? If I chose to do that, if I needed to rest, that would be a good thing as well. Rest is a good thing that God gives us. But on Wednesday morning, I'd also been reading my Bible and I'd been praying for a dad from soccer.

I've had a couple of little conversations with him about religion. And I'd be praying that I'd have an opportunity to talk to him on Wednesday afternoon about Jesus.

[11:35] And there's this really dangerous thing that happens when you pray. God answers our prayers. So sometimes it's just easier. Maybe I shouldn't pray that because God might actually put that situation before me.

So Wednesday afternoon, I'm thinking, it would really be good to do whatever I like right now, to have that little piece of rest. But I made the decision, actually, do you know what?

I should go. I should see if I can stand there and encourage my son while he plays soccer and maybe even see if I can have a little conversation with this other dad.

And I ended up having a 45-minute conversation about life, religion, Jesus, his religion, his background, his thoughts, and we're catching up this Wednesday for lunch. Now, you might expect me to do that as the missions pastor.

I really didn't want to do that. And it was also a very easy and simple thing. Now, this is just a very small example of what it means to be a living sacrifice.

[12:41] There is the living sacrifice of offering our lives and choosing to put our pride and our lust and our greed away and offering ourselves to God.

But there is also those small things. Because we can make our lives look pretty Christian, but also continue to be self-centered. Will I sacrifice my hopes and my dreams and my rest and that little 45 minutes I had?

There is that inner battle. Because rest in that moment would have been good, but God actually said there is something better here. Here, Paul says, this living sacrifice, this life that we have, we can live it and it's pleasing to God.

Pleasing to God. I think this is amazing. God is already pleased with us. He said to Jesus at his baptism, this is my son in whom I am well pleased.

And God makes us his children and he is pleased with us. It's a delight to be pleased with my kids and to enjoy them and see that they are enjoying me being pleased with them.

[13:59] But can you imagine that we can actually enjoy this with the God of the universe? The God of the universe is actually already pleased with us. Not because of us, but because of him.

Speaking of soccer, as I go to soccer on a Saturday morning, there are some parents who look pleased with their kids. And there are some parents who are only pleased with their kids when they're scoring goals, when they're, you know, kicking the ball in the right direction and not going in the wrong direction.

You know, this is under sixes, so any small win is a win. I work hard to be the parent shouting encouragement. There are some parents who are shouting abusive encouragement on the sidelines.

God is the parent who is pleased with their children whether they are scoring a goal or whether they are chasing butterflies in the wrong direction. God is already pleased with us and he invites us to be

in a relationship with him where we continue to follow him, where we offer our entire lives as a living sacrifice because it is pleasing to him.

What a wonderful delight that is. The second aspect of this radical Christian life is that as we go through life as a living sacrifice, it is to be transformed but not conformed.

[15:26] Verse 2. 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.

Paul holds up two ways to live, two patterns of life, the pattern of the world and the pattern of God's will and they are always set against each other.

Living a pleasing, sacrificial life to God means to see the patterns of thinking of the world and not conform to them but to see the patterns and thinking of God and be transformed to live in that way. The world says to us, you deserve this, treat yourself. The world says you are the most important. Everyone else is wrong.

Don't listen to them. The world says you can be whatever you want and you can do whatever you want. The world says that we should celebrate this and if you don't, well we will reject you.

[16:39] You should chase the dream, put yourself first and be the best version of whoever you want to be. That is the pattern of the world that we live in at the moment. But the gospel tells us that we don't deserve anything good but God gives us mercy and grace.

We don't deserve anything good but we are loved and valued. We can do whatever we want because we are forgiven but we can choose to love and obey Jesus out of love and thanks to God in his mercy.

being the best version of me is not actually whatever is in me, it is Jesus. That is the best version of me so that is the version I pursue.

That is an identity that will stand the test of time that will not be shaken by the changing shifting pattern of the world around me. When our identity is first found and defined by God, it helps us to see everything else clearly.

We can see the patterns of the world and we can test them. Is it actually going to help me to conform to this pattern of the world or am I going to be transformed to live and follow God's good and perfect will?

[18:04] And so, we see God's mercy to us. We dwell on God's mercy. It helps us understand how good he is to us, how he is pleased with us in Jesus, how we choose to live for him.

And then it helps us to see ourselves for who we truly are. It's our second point today. If I can get the buttons to work, Wendy, I might get you to push the button.

Thank you, sister. Now we can have a new view of ourself. Our primary relationship is with God. That is the most important one with us.

When we have that primary relationship, we can understand who we are. And so, verse 3, by the grace given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourselves 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.

Do not think of your health more highly than you ought, but think of yourself with sober judgment. Paul has shown us that we are to live in light of God's mercies.

[19:15] That's how we live in right relationship with him. You only need to be reading the Old Testament to see how constantly the people would remember, this is what God has done for us. This is the God who has saved us from Egypt, living in light of God's mercies, living sacrificially, transformed by his mercy.

And now he shows us how we are to relate to ourselves. And he uses the language of sober judgment. Think of a person who is not sober, who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs, someone who is not thinking clearly.

They will often, in my limited experience, act in one of two ways. They will either become very boastful, they will think that they can do anything, I can jump over that wall, I can fight that crocodile, I can drive a car, I can do anything.

None of these are good decisions, but also impacted by alcohol or drugs, the opposite can happen. Alcohol is a depressant, and so people can be depressed, unwilling to do anything, or thinking lowly of themselves.

And so Paul is saying, don't react in either of those ways, think clearly of yourself. Think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith given you by God.

[ 20 : 45 ] We only need to go back to Romans 3, which has a wonderful contrast that demonstrates this. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. Think of yourselves as incredibly low.

We all deserve his punishment. It would be right to think of ourselves as the lowest of the lows. And yet the very next verse, we are all justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came in Christ Jesus.

How can we think lowly of ourselves when God has said that his son has died for us and that he values us so highly? It is this wonderful contradiction of holding these two together.

We have sinned and fallen far short of the glory of God, and yet in Jesus he redeems us and values us. And so we need to hold these two together because Paul has warned us of the danger of conforming ourselves to the pattern of the world.

Our culture gives warnings to low self-esteem. But really the biggest issue of the world is egocentrism and self-centeredness.

[ 21 : 53 ] Having an inflated ego, thinking too highly of ourselves. But we are called to have sober judgment, to think clearly about who we are, in accordance with the faith given us.

Now, when I first read this, I thought, in accordance with the faith, it seems like it's about the amount of faith that God has given to me. And so if God has given me much faith, I can think highly of myself.

I'm so faithful, I'm really great because of how much faith God has given me. But if you've been with us over the last three weeks, Paul has been talking about the Christians and the Jews and the Gentiles and how salvation works for these groups coming in.

And so it's not about how much faith I have. Paul is calling on the Jews not to think too highly of themselves. They have come from a long lineage of people following God.

Don't think that you're better because you have this. And Gentiles, just because you've been Christian for about half an hour, don't think of yourselves too lowly, God has given the same faith to each of you.

[ 23 : 07 ] God is the one who gives faith, regardless of background, regardless of abilities and giftings. God loves us equally in Jesus. And so the gospel prevents us from thinking more lowly of ourselves and more highly of ourselves.

It's a call to remember who we are in the gospel, valued and loved by God. And so when we are sitting in God's mercy, understanding of who we are, undeserved and yet valued and loved, we understand how we relate to other people.

Because we are not saved to be an island. Christians have an interdependent relationship with others. We have a new service. Verse 4 and 5.

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we though many form one body and each member belongs to all the others.

We have different gifts, different personalities, different histories and abilities that equip us to serve each other differently. God has deliberately created his church to be a beautiful tapestry of uniqueness and difference.

[ 24 : 29 ] A place where that difference is needed and celebrated and not just ironed out so everybody would look like me because that would be a terrible thing.

And then verse 6. We have different gifts according to the grace God gives us. God is the one who makes us righteous by his grace and he gives us gifts by that same grace.

But these aren't for our benefit, these are to be given to others. They are for others. We all have a role to play in the church. We need others and others need us.

When we see ourselves with sober judgment, when we see ourselves rightly, we see that we are not to be on our own. We belong to God as his children, but we also belong to the church.

And Paul goes on to list a number of gifts. It's similar to the list in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. I'm not going to extensively look at this list today, but you can see that as we go through this, these are gifts for others.

[ 25 : 40 ] These are other person-centered. And so if your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith. If it's serving, then serve. If it's teaching, then teach. If it's to encourage, then give encouragement.

If it's giving, then give generously. If it's to lead, do it diligently. If it's to show mercy, do it cheerfully. I recently did a gifts assessment.

It's one of the things that we are working on as a church. I have done these gifts assessment in the past. If you don't know of them, what you do is you go through a bunch of questions just to see and help you identify how God has gifted you because he has gifted us all very differently.

And two of the main gifts that stuck out to me this time as I did it was hosting and evangelism. And I think that's, it was really helpful for me to do that because it's reminded me of one of my great loves, being part of the church, having people at my house and eating food together.

I'm not sure if you've done that with me. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands. If you haven't been to my house and eaten food, I'd love you to come to my house and eat food. Hosting is one of my favorite things.

[ 26 : 59 ] I saw these two gifts, hosting and evangelism, and I thought, yes, this is something I love to do. And I saw this as also a wonderful combination in a way that I haven't really done it, done it in an evangelistic way.

And so as I mentioned, I'm having lunch with this guy on Wednesday, I really want to have him and his family over and eat food with them and share not just bread, but also the good news of Jesus.

And so that's one thing that's encouraging me, this other person centeredness of these gifts. Do you know what your gifts are? Do you know how God has uniquely created you as part of the church to love and serve other people?

Now, I know because I've done these in the past. I know how God has gifted me and it's led me into pastoral ministry. But I still needed that reminder to encourage me to lean into that, to be doing that more.

Come and talk with me after church. I've got a test that I can get you to do if you would like to do that. That would be wonderful and helpful to be thinking about this. A reordered view of God, a reordered view of ourselves, helps us to have a healthy Christian life to serve others as part of the church.

[ 28 : 28 ] It presents a wonderful picture of the church's family, where we know our place, we know our roles, and know the one who is directing things.

And the key to all of it is our relationship with the head, with God, the one who is directing all things. Because when we don't have that relationship first, it all falls apart.

I did a funeral last week. I haven't done funerals for a while, but I was involved in a funeral, and it reminded me of the impact that happens on a family when a patriarch or a matriarch dies.

I'm not sure if you've seen this before, but there's often in families one key person that's holding things together. You know, you think about Christmas time, all of the different families get together because they have to spend time with that one key person.

It's the grandmother who's making sure that everybody brings the food and everybody gathers. But what can happen is that when that person passes, there can be bickering and infighting.

[ 29 : 38 ] People don't know how to relate to each other anymore because there is that one person holding everything together. And slowly the families pull apart. What used to hold them together now has gone and so they're just divided.

I wonder if we can view Christianity as just people who are similar and so we just spend time together, but other than a Sunday, you know, we're not really in each other's lives and that's not important.

We can try and hold our Christianity together without God at the centre. It's going to be useless to try and do that as a Christian community without God at the centre.

He is the key. He is the one who defines our relationships. And thankfully, he'll never pass away because he's eternal. But he is the one who is over all our relationships.

He is the one who gives shape to who we are and who we are as a church. Knowing how good he has been through much sin and much rebellion shapes us and calls us to forgive one another.

[ 30 : 52 ] Knowing his undeserved loves give shape to our identity. mercy. And so, brothers and sisters, tonight, tomorrow, sometime this week, let me call you to do what Paul did in verse one, to meditate on God's mercies.

When we meditate on God's mercies, it gives shape to our relationship with him. It gives shape to who we are as his people and how we serve everyone else. And so this week, sit in his mercies.

Read a psalm. Go through the last 11 chapters of Romans. Just flick through them. Find a heading. Read a part. And just remind yourself of how good God has been to you.

Even remember your story. Sit in your story as a Christian and meditate on his mercies and love to you. Let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your love and your mercy in Jesus.

That while we were still far off, you sent Jesus to die, to come to life, to give us life in you. Father, help us never be far from you.

[ 32 : 10 ] Help us to draw close to you by remembering your mercy so that it would shape our relationship with you. Shape who we are as your people and us as your church.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.