

Together in Christ

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[0:00] If you've got Romans 12 open, that will help you and it will help me. Let me pray and we'll have a look at it together. Dear Father, we thank you that your word has been preserved so that we can look at it together.

We can learn from it together. And that your spirit will speak to us through it. So I pray that this morning I'll be able to get out of the way as you speak into our hearts.

Amen. I do confirmations pretty much every week, but that doesn't stop them from being special. Every time I lead a service where I meet people who've decided they want to stand up and declare to all their friends and family, their church that they belong to, that they want to follow Jesus for the rest of their life, it's exciting.

It's really encouraging. It is the best part of my job. There's no question about that. But I kind of, as I do it, I keep thinking, I wonder if people have thought about it.

What does a Christian look like? I mean, we know where they're going to stand up in a minute.

We're going to look at them. But what does a saved Christian person, someone who's saved from their sins, what do they look like?

[1:21] What does a saved person look like? So I thought I'd get some photos. I don't know whether they're on the PowerPoint or they should be. I've got some pictures here of saved people.

Can we have the first one? That's not it. That's transformed. Oh, there we are. Which person in this picture do you think is saved?

I'll give you the clue. It's the old guy with his mouth open. Tony Bullimore. Do you remember him?

Anybody remember Tony Bullimore? Come on, please help me. Yeah. Thank you.

Tony Bullimore was sailing around the world in a solo yacht race and he was doing pretty well but not in front and he wanted to win. He worked out that if he left the south of Africa and cut across the southern ocean, really close to Antarctica, he could get to the bottom of South America quicker than the others in the race.

The risk is that the seas down there are massive and they were and they not only smashed his mast, they took the keel off his yacht.

[2:31] If you have a boat in the southern ocean without a keel and without a mast, you are basically doomed and he thought he was. He thought he was going to die. He let off his emergency beacon and the RAAF and the Royal Australian Navy put a mission together where they found him in the southern ocean bobbing around in his yacht.

It was basically like being on a cork in the ocean. They found him and they rescued him. He met the guy who was flying the helicopter and he hugged him and kissed him.

Next photo. Which person in this shot do you think has just been saved? You know, the guy coming out of the cage. Do you remember the Beaconsfield mine?

Yeah. Remember that? They had been cramped and trapped in a mine in Tasmania for nine days. They could hardly walk.

But when he came up in the lift, having been rescued, and he saw his wife, he threw his arms in the air and he raced over and burst into tears and hugged her.

[3:44] What a surprise, right? No surprise, really. Well, this next picture. More recently, only a few weeks ago, this man was in a cave mining.

Mining is dangerous, but they usually have mines, particularly in Australia, have engineers that tell you how the mine can be built. In Laos, they're mining in caves.

No engineering. The cave flooded and they were trapped. But through the heroic rescue work of people, doctors and swimmers and cave dwellers, I don't know what they...

They rescued this man. He came racing out. He'd been down there without food, water, or anything and ran straight to his family. There was no guessing which person had been saved.

So I want to ask you in the question again, what does a baptised, confirmed, saved person look like? It's pretty easy in those photos to work out who's been saved because of their response.

[4:49] They jump, they scream, they cry, they hug, they are affectionate and they let everybody know. They let everybody know. But what does a baptised, confirmed and saved person look like?

Because I've got to tell you, I do confirmations every week. And most times they're the people who timidly, shyly, quietly stand on stage in front of everybody going, can I sit down?

But what about you? Are you a saved person? What do you look like? Do you look exactly the same as your neighbours? Do you live the same way as everybody else?

Because you see, Romans chapter 12 is where Paul says, actually, if you're a saved person, you can't live like everybody else.

Let me take you again to those first couple of verses. I want to urge you, says Paul, in view of God's mercies. If you've got your own Bible there and it says mercy, singular, I can tell you now with all the authority of a bishop, you can cross that out and put in mercies.

[5:56] It's plural. I don't know why the translators put it as singular. In view of all the things that God has done, the incredible actions that he has taken, in view of all of God's mercies, I appeal to you to live differently.

Your worship, your life, holy and pleasing to God. And then he goes on. See in verse 2? Don't conform any longer to the pattern of this world.

Be different. Don't look the same. So I want to ask you again, what does a saved person look like? What does a rescued person do?

It's different. We live differently. And I want to say to all of you people who are standing up to be confirmed, I want to encourage you to live differently, to be different. But to really get an understanding of what Paul's doing here, I want to go all the way back to chapter 1.

You're thinking, how long are we going to be here? We've only just got into two verses of chapter 12, and already he's taken us all the way back to chapter 1. It's because I want you to understand why Paul says, you need to be different.

[7:15] It's because of what God has done. And back in chapter 1, we see what we are by nature. By nature, we ignore God.

By nature, we don't give him any time at all. And in chapters 1 and chapter 2 and chapter 3 of Romans, Paul lays that out.

He says, by nature, what you'll do is you'll go and make idols. You'll go and make other things that will fill the place that belongs to me, says God.

And you can see that in the world. People, they've literally done it in terms of carving timbers and woods or making statues out of all kinds of metals or stone, and then they worship it.

I've travelled around the world and seen it in temples and in buildings, in India or in Asia. I've even seen it in restaurants around here.

[8:11] People have got little idols. But you know what? We don't even need those to have idols. We can make an idol out of anything.

Because an idol is anything that takes God's place. And by nature, we will do that. We will put things in God's place and we ignore him.

And the evidence of that is often seen when people only think of God either at Christmas and Easter, maybe. Quite often at funerals, I've discovered. Otherwise, he doesn't figure in their life at all.

He has no place, no time. But by the time Paul gets to chapter 5, there's an incredible change that's happened.

By nature, we've pushed God out, either by putting somebody else deliberately in its place, rock, stone, gold, whatever, or ignoring him entirely.

[9:10] But in chapter 5, we discover that God doesn't ignore us. It's really clear in chapter 5, Paul says, by nature, we ignore God.

And by doing that, we become his enemies. But God doesn't treat us like enemies.

He shows us mercy. Now, I've said that before at churches, and some people have been really offended. They've said to me, look, I think you're overstating it a bit. People may ignore God, but they don't make, it's not an enemy situation.

Well, let me say, with the greatest respect, I'm only repeating what Paul said, and actually, who said you could be the judge of what is the enemy or not?

It's a bit like my grandfather was in World War I, right? My grandfather was in World War I. He was fighting on the Western Front in northern France and in Belgium. He was in trench warfare, and they would go from one trench to the other.

[10:17] And there was one moment where he was carrying a machine gun. He was in the Vickers, Machine Gunners, and he was going over the top, carrying the machine gun with him, there was two of them who carried it, jumped into the next trench, right on top of a German soldier.

And the guy was there and just threw his hands in the air. And in the clearest English said, I surrender. In fact, he had a British accent, but he was wearing a German uniform. And my grandfather, who had a machine gun, but no sidearms, just said, well, you're captured.

And so he said, yeah, I give in. And they started chatting to him. They said, your English is very good. He said, I studied at Cambridge, but I was born in Germany and grew up there.

And so, although I was educated in Cambridge, I've gone back to Germany and I'm a cook. They said, a cook? No, the Australians didn't have a cook.

They used to eat terrible food. So they thought, a cook? So they got him to take his jacket off and they put an Australian jacket on him and they included him in their group. He was harmless. He was a nice guy.

[11:22] In fact, they called him Smitty. When their British officer came around and did a head count, he noticed the numbers had gone up, which is unusual in war.

And he was trying to work out what was going on and they came to name off and they said, oh, no, Smitty, he's been, no, Smitty, he's a great bloke. He's been with us for ages.

No, he's a good bloke, good bloke, good bloke. When the officer discovered he was an enemy, he treated him as an enemy. He was arrested and taken off because he was an enemy.

It's not up to my grandfather to decide. It's not up to me to decide. God says the way we ignore him makes us his enemy. Now, what can we do about that?

Well, Smitty could cook, but even his good deeds didn't make him an Australian. What could make him? The only way that could happen is a declaration from the king and that's what Paul says happens for us.

[12:27] There's a declaration made by the king of kings and the lord of lords that you can stop being my enemy and become my friend. No, no, actually, it's more than that.

Chapter five and into chapter eight, you don't just become God's friend, you become a member of the royal family. Can you imagine that?

Being taken from being an enemy and given the status of the family of the king of kings. Wow.

But that's the promise that Romans chapter eight, verse one has. If you are in Christ, there is no longer any condemnation for you. So believe in Jesus.

What an incredible mercy. And Paul in chapter nine makes it abundantly clear that that change in status from being an enemy to being a family member doesn't happen because of anything we have done.

[13:32] In fact, chapter nine, verse 16 makes it abundantly clear that it's through God's mercy, not our desire or by our effort.

And if you've never noticed that verse, I reckon it's one of the greatest verses in scriptures. So if you've got your Bible there again, open to chapter nine and underline it. Highlight it.

Tell somebody about it this week. I've discovered the test of a sermon is really by Wednesday. If on Wednesday you can remember something that I said, then we've both done pretty well.

Probably you better than me. But I reckon if you can remember by Wednesday to remind someone of Romans 9.16, it's not by my effort, my desires, but by God's mercy that I'm saved.

What a good thing to say to someone. Try it by Wednesday. There's your homework. There's a challenge. See how you go with that. And it's that mercy that transforms everything.

[14:38] There's the rescue that's taken place. And that's why Paul starts chapter 12 and says, in verse 1, in view of God's love that has been lavished upon you, in view of all of that, don't stay the same.

Don't live like everybody else. Don't be like your neighbours. Be different. So what does being different look like? What does it look like?

And that's where, if you move in to verses 3 to 8, you'll see what it is to look differently. Paul says, by the grace given to me, I say to every one of you, don't think of yourself more highly than you should.

Guess what? That's not the message that you hear on podcasts, in the media, and in literature today. It's actually, you should think well of yourself.

It's very bad for your mental health if you don't. So is Paul saying something to damage your mental health? No, what he's saying is, don't put yourself first. That's a fundamental error.

[15:56] It is the mistake that the world makes. Look after number one. But God is number one. Look after others. consider others better than you.

It's not to think that you're the worst. That's not what Paul is saying. It's actually, he even goes on to say, have sober judgment.

Think of yourself in the right way. C.S. Lewis put it brilliantly. He said, it's not that you think less of yourself, but you think of yourself less.

That's clever, isn't it? It's not that you think less of yourself, but you think about yourself less.

Because you're thinking of others before yourself.

You're thinking of others' needs, others' concerns, others' cares. You're thinking of other people.

Why? Because that's exactly what God does with us. God did not hesitate to send Jesus into the world.

[17:01] Jesus did not hesitate. In fact, he didn't cling on to what was rightfully his, but instead, he put us first.

Have a look at Philippians 2. It puts it beautifully. What else does it look like to be a rescued person? Well, he goes on and he says, serve.

You've been involved in this new family. you've become a member of a new body. And he says, let me use that as an illustration. And being in a body means you've got a role to play.

Is there one part of the body that's more important than the other? No. We all fit together. We all work together. We have different roles to do. Absolutely. But we belong together.

I want to say that people who are standing up to be confirmed this morning, find your place in the body. Work out where to serve. You've probably already started doing it. Let me encourage you to continue to do it and to continue to find new places to do it.

[18:04] There will be seasons where you're good at one thing and then another thing will come along. The thing to continue to do is to see where God wants you to serve. And usually it will be by seeing where there's a gap.

Where can I help? Where can I fill in? What can I do to be useful in this body? But again, that's different to the way the world sees things because to do that sort of thing usually you get a reward, a payment.

Well, this is not to get a payment. This is not to get a reward. In fact, it's because you've been given something that is incredibly precious, a place in God's family, that you take part in this body, in this life.

In fact, work out what it is that you do and do it. So what does it look like to be a saved person? It means to live differently, speak differently, be motivated by different things, to be motivated by what God has done.

How can you do that? How can you know what is good that we should cling to and pursue? How do you know what God likes?

[19:18] Well, let me say, I think there are a number of things you can do, but the foundational, most significant one is to read your Bible.

I encourage you to read your Bible every day. When I was about 15, I went to a conference and the speaker at the conference was really challenging us to read our Bibles every day.

And he said, I'm going to call on everybody here to make a covenant between themselves and the Lord. And this is the covenant. No Bible, no breakfast. Stand where you are and covenant now Lord that if you don't read your Bible, you will not eat breakfast.

I couldn't do it. I couldn't stand up and say that because I love breakfast and I know how hopeless I am. Sometimes I get up, I've slept in, I'm running late, have breakfast, get out and go. I can catch up.

I can read it late. So I didn't stand up. There was about 500 people there and I reckon there's only about four or five of us that didn't stand up. I felt so guilty after that that every morning when I was

going to have breakfast I had to go and read my Bible.

[20:30] And you know what? Reading my Bible every day has been so helpful. When I was very little, the Sunday school I went to, which is led by my mum, we learned memory verses so that we could remember what the Bible said.

Anybody here do memory verses? We did it with one for every letter of the alphabet. A, all of sin and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3.23. B, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved, you and your household.

Acts 16. C, come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden and I'll give you rest. Matthew 11.28. I can go through the alphabet still. I learned that when I was about six. I went to theological college.

Cramming my head full of theologians and commentaries and books and lecturers sitting in an exam. I went straight back to my memory verses from when I was six. How good it is to know the word of God to understand what pleases him.

Because another thing my dear mum said to me was, Christopher, garbage in, garbage out. If you fill your time with television, guess what you're going to know? And to my shame, I can sing to you word perfect the beginning of Gilligan's Island, the Beverly Hillbillies.

[21:55] All those years of watching television have got in. Do not think that spending time with television, podcasts, media will not influence you.

It will. So counter that by being in the word of God regularly. Daily. Daily. Daily. Daily. Daily. Daily. Daily. Daily. Daily. Daily.

I didn't give the emphasis to you, Sauron, just because I'm picking on you. But because it's so important to look at God's word every day.

To know his will for you. So with all that, we're going to call these people up to see if they look any different. And let me say right now, they won't.

Not on the outside. But the way that they live, I pray for you that you will live differently and you won't conform any longer to the patterns of this world.

[22:55] Let me pray for them. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word, for the assurance that we can trust in the work that Jesus has done to take us from being an enemy of yours to being not only a friend but in your family.

We thank you for that good news. And I pray that in view of that good news, we would never stay the same. Amen.