

The Church is shaped by the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Please, if you would turn with me to Romans chapter 12. So, Romans chapter 12, and I know that we did verses 1 and 2 last time, but it would be good if we picked it up at verse 1 and read through to the end of verse 21.

The section we'll be concentrating on will be 3 through to 21, but it's good to keep it in its context. So now hear God's word, beginning at Romans 12, chapter 12, verse 1.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

[1 : 32] For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function. So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them. Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation. Be constant in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints. And seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them.

[2 : 55] Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.

Never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil. But give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord.

To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by doing so, you will heap burning coals on his head.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Let us pray.

[3 : 55] Father God, we have just read your word, and it feels as though we have been faced with an impossible list to do.

We recognize what it says, that we are different, but we also recognize what it says for our love to be genuine. And we recognize that apart from Jesus, we're not going to be able to do any of these things.

So, Father God, may the grace of Christ in our life this evening be evident in the fact that we are willing to be like this, like this your word wants us to be.

And so, Father, we ask for your grace to be able to discern your will, and we ask for your grace to be able to do it also. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, this part of Romans reminds me, in a very simple way, that God is not like us, and God doesn't do things the way we would do them.

I find it very odd that God would find that the best way to create unity in the church is by making everyone different. It doesn't seem to rally or make any sense.

[5 : 16] But here in Romans and over in Ephesians, that's exactly what God does. But God does, however, save us all in the same way, and that is why Paul has gone from explaining what the gospel does in the fact Jesus accomplishing salvation for us, to now explaining the implications of

the gospel for saved people.

In other words, the gospel is not something you leave behind. Okay? The gospel continues to shape you as a Christian. All the mercies of God, all the truth contained in the gospel, is what should shape you from now on in.

Okay? Before the world shapes you. And that's why Paul has to say, don't be conformed to the world now that you're saved. Be shaped by the gospel, don't be shaped by the world.

Now that puts us in a very sort of delicate position in the sense that Paul imagines the Christian being someone that's always going to be molded or shaped or transformed in some way.

But he does seem to make a distinction between external conforming and internal change. The Christian is the one who changes internally.

[6 : 32] And I can never forget sitting in Professor Donald MacLeod's lectures of him pointing out very carefully in Romans, and he's brilliant at what he did, and he's written it in his book, that when a Christian is adopted into God or adopted by God into himself, that that Christian goes through a DNA change.

You know, when we, if we were to adopt a child, we could give that child everything that we had to give them. But the one thing that we could not give an adopted child is their DNA.

Okay? They have their own. But when we have been adopted into the family of God to become like Christ, we are given a DNA change.

We are becoming like Christ. And so 1 Peter says, you know, do you not know that you are partakers of the divine nature? So your change is a transformational internal change.

Okay? You're different on the inside, not just different on the outside. So don't conform to the world when inwardly you're being renewed every day.

[7 : 46] Okay? Don't be shaped by the world externally when internally something completely opposite is actually happening to you. And we can understand that kind of tension in the world, you know, where we get tempted by what the world has to offer.

And the reason we feel the temptation and the rub so heavily is because internally the very opposite is happening. God is doing his graceful work in us and making us more like Christ internally and externally, you know, we do the very opposite.

So Paul has to say, don't be conformed to this world. Rather be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Now, it's interesting because in Thessalonians, it states what the will of God is.

But it states what the will of God is in particular to holiness. Here, Paul's quite clear that the will of God is something to be discerned by the Christian. And that means that not all Christians, I would assume, if they do not go through the process of having their minds renewed or they're not presenting their bodies to God as a living sacrifice, are then going to be unable to discern what the will of God is.

And how many of us struggle with knowing what God would have us do? That is a difficulty, isn't it? Of we know everything that God requires, we know what the Bible teaches, but the application of that is different.

[9 : 16] Okay? We don't eat the same meal every single day. Well, some of us might eat the same meal for a couple of days if there's leftovers. And of course, there's nothing wrong with that. But we don't eat the same meal every day.

And each day is a different day. And each day presents itself with different opportunities and challenges. And you need to be able to discern God's will differently or in the same way, but in different situations.

And so Paul lays all this out with a very simple message that he's already said. That the only reason we have a future and we're able to discern God's will in that future is because of God's mercy.

The only reason you're here today is because God's mercies were new every morning. And the only reason that you're going to wake up tomorrow morning and enjoy the day that God has for you is because God has given it to you in his mercy.

God's mercy is never meant to be seen in the past tense only. As if I'm paying God back for what God has done for me. But how many Christians live like that?

[10 : 25] It's simply a case of, well, God saved me. He gave his son to die on the cross for me. He's done all of this for me. So I must, I must at least put a show in. I must at least pray at least once a week.

Right? And what you end up having, what you end up having is that the Christian life is determined by how much you think you should be thankful. Isn't it interesting that the more thankful you are, you pray more?

Okay, the more aware you are of your thankfulness and how thankful you ought to be, you pray more. But is that really the kind of motivation that the Christian life should have? And the answer is no. No, not at all.

Because you're purely remembering God's mercy's past tense. Where what Paul is saying here is that the mercies are today, as much as they were yesterday, as much as they were back at the cross, as much as they were before that when God decided to send his son.

God's mercies are ready for you every single morning you wake up. And because of that, you have a future. In fact, that is the only reason why you have a future.

[11 : 32] Because God is merciful. So, we don't pay God back for the mercy that he has shown to us. We live in God's new mercies, as well as the old mercies, every single day.

Okay? In other words, we're constantly in his debt. And we don't have to pay any of that debt, but we're constantly in his debt for all the mercy that he shows us.

So, God's mercy goes hand in hand with God's future for us. Mercy has a purpose. And the purpose is, is that you're transformed.

That you're different. That you change over time. In fact, I was back in Cornwall last week. And there's very few Christians in my family.

It hopefully will grow. But it's interesting how people use different words to mean different things. I don't like the word of journey.

[12 : 36] I like the word of growth. But I'm not too keen on the word of journey. I'm on a Christian journey. I had to point out to the person that I traveled all the way from Scotland to Cornwall. And I was the same person in Scotland as I was when I got to Cornwall.

And I was on a journey. It didn't involve any change in me. The only thing that changed was my location. But growth, Christian growth, dictates that you're different over time.

Not that you're just in a different location over time, but that you're actually different over time. And so God's mercies and God's future that he has for you is so that you will be different over time.

None of us changes immediately. In fact, the Christian life is a slow plod for many of us. Some of us may experience great grace and great growth initially or halfway through or periods, but generally speaking, it's a pretty much of a plod for most of us.

And that's how God works. A bit at a time. A bit at a time. So God's mercies are new. God's future is for you. But it's for you to not be the same as you were yesterday or the day before or last year.

[13 : 58] Now, Paul moves on from this by then saying that he has given us gifts of grace. In other words, Paul wants us to know where we live.

So we live in two locations. The first location that we live in is that we live in the world and so don't be conformed to it. But more importantly, we live in this thing called the body, the church.

And in this body, there are different people with different gifts and they have different gifts because God has given us different gifts. That means we are purposely not the same because God has ordered us not to be the same.

Okay? How often is it that we might just want to be like somebody else? But why would you want to be like somebody else when God has the very reason and purpose for making you just the way you are?

Why do you want to be anything different than what God has made you to be? And why are you so wanting another gift and not necessarily recognize the gift that God has given you?

[15 : 04] And this is why he says, verse 3, that there's grace given to him but this grace means that no one should think more highly of himself than he ought but a person should think of themselves with sober judgment.

In other words, you need to think of yourself really clearly. Some of us can do things that others can and then he says, most strikingly, that we're to do this in the measure of faith that God has given us. And what that means is this, that not all of us have the same amount of faith for understanding the same things that God has given us. Why is it that the missionaries we have in this church that lived in, well, excuse me, one is still in Africa in Botswana, the others now have moved to Australia, why is it that they had the faith to just do that?

Well, the answer, the biblical answer is at least because God gave them a measure of faith to be able to do that. So for us to say they could do that, I could never do that, well, one of the reasons why you may not be able to do that or you feel that you may not be able to do that is because God hasn't given you the measure of faith to be able to make that decision.

But when people make decisions, wise decisions, in sober judgment and in faith they do so according to the measure of faith that God has given them.

[16:30] So, the missionaries aren't better than you here. Okay? They're not any better or any more godly or any more worthy of God's praise because they've gone out and lived in another country with snakes and spiders and all the other creepy things into a country where they have to learn a whole new language and proclaim the gospel.

Okay? They are able to do that not because they're able to do it. They're able to do it because of the measure of faith given to them. And you're able to do what you do in this church because of the measure of faith given to you.

One is not better than the other. Both are being exercised out of the measure of faith that God has given you. Okay?

And that's important. And it's important so that you don't become disillusioned with the Christian life that you live and so that you don't feel as though I'm not as good as them. You are and they're as good as you.

Everyone if they live in accordance with the measure of faith that God has given them and in accordance with the gift of the graceful gift that God has given you should think about this soberly.

[17:40] Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought and don't think of anybody else more highly either. We are what we are because God has ordained us to do what we do.

I always wanted to be a boat builder but I never became a boat builder. Then I became a roofer and I was a happy roofer. I was a lonely roofer but I was a happy roofer.

And then God decided for me to sell the business and to sell the house and enter into the ministry. Well, I never what?

You know, why did it happen? Well, the thing is, have you ever tried arguing with God? You ever tried not for me? You've got the wrong person? It doesn't work, does it?

And this is because when God gives you a measure of faith, you find yourself doing things that previously you didn't do before. Okay? That's how God moves us on. And then God gives you a grace gift and suddenly you find yourself able to do something that you weren't able to do before or at least you never thought you could do it before.

[18:47] So here we have God enabling a whole church okay? Through graceful giving and through a measure of faith to fulfill those graceful gifts in the body of Christ.

Okay? What does that mean? It means that no one's better than anybody else. Okay? No one's exceptional and no one's unexceptional.

No one's better at this or better at that. Rather, there's an issue of graceful gifts for the purposes that they are given. Sometimes I have seen great damage done in the church through comparisons that have damaged the individual or damaged the body when what should have happened is a recognition of the different gifts that God has given to different people for the purposes of building up the body.

We are not the same because we're not meant to be the same. God creates a body out of everybody who is different. In fact, God creates unity purposely by making us all different. So if you have the gift of teaching, teach. But remember that when you teach, it's not your ability, it's been given to you. If you have the gift of teaching, you have to remember the corresponding responsibility that comes with that.

[20:16] So teachers are going to be judged more highly than anybody else because they use their words and they speak on behalf of God. But if you've been given the gift of hospitality, it's not because you're naturally hospitable.

You might be and God's grace has amplified that greatly. so the corresponding responsibility is be hospitable. What does that look like?

Well, some people are much more at ease in having people around at their house week in and week out. They just seem to do it. I look at it and think, how do they manage that? Well, they manage it because of God's graceful gift in enabling them to be able to do that.

Generosity. Those who contribute largely financially and in other ways. How does this happen? Well, it happens not because they are naturally that way inclined but rather because God in his graceful giving and in measure of faith changes people and that builds the body, it builds the church and that's why things change.

In fact, there's a whole list here of the type of things that we are able to do or ought to do as we live in this thing called the body, the church.

[21 : 35] The question now is, is how do I discover my gift? Okay, if God has given me a gift, how do I discover it? Now, some people would say, well, you need to go on a Discover Your Gift weekend conference and the answer is, it's far simpler than that and far less expensive.

You don't have to pay for it. Okay? You say, well, I don't pay for that, I pay for the meals that go with it and the fellowship. Well, maybe, okay, listen, this is how easy it is to understand what your gift is and what God has given it to you.

Number one, you have to discover it in sober judgment. Number two, you have to discover it in faith. And number three, you're only ever going to be able to do those two if your mind is being renewed.

And how is your mind being renewed to be able to discern the will of God? You need to worship God properly. So the reason we read one and two, even though we've already tackled verses one and two, is because the proper worship of God leads you to be able to discern what the will of God is because your mind is being renewed.

When your mind is renewed, you are then able to think soberly, sensibly. And thinking sensibly means you're able to do this with the measure of faith that God has given you.

[22 : 52] And then you're able to come to the conclusion of being able to discern what the will of God is concerning the gift that God has given to you. Very simple. Starts with the worship of God.

It then leads to the renewing of your mind, which enables you to discern the will of God, which enables you to think soberly in the measure of faith that God has given you to discern what gift God has actually given you.

No conference, no payment, just worship God. So God takes care of everything. As we move on then, Paul has something more to say.

And this is the qualifier in verse 9. Let your love be genuine. Now the list here is an impressive list. I'm just going to name a few. It's a list of imperatives, and the best way to think of an imperative is this way. It's something to be believed and something to be done. Okay? What's an imperative?

[23 : 58] It's something to be believed and something to be done. Listen to them. Abore what is evil, be constant in prayer, don't be slothful, seek to show hospitality, that's just to name a few.

If we were to go on, others include serving, rejoicing, blessing those who persecute you, live in harmony, leave vengeance to God, and all of these things and many more that I've not mentioned here are all preceded with this key imperative of let your love be genuine.

Well, what does genuine love look like and how do we do that? What is genuine love? Well, there is another way of putting it and it's this, that when your life adheres to biblical principles, that's another definition of genuine love.

To put it in the words of Jesus Christ, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. To reverse that would be by keeping the commandments of Jesus, you are demonstrating genuine love.

Okay? By keeping the commandments of Jesus, you are demonstrating genuine love. What does that mean? Is it easy to love? No. Because it's not easy to keep the commandments. So, genuine love is a very difficult thing to get to, but it is the very thing, the very necessary ingredient to produce all the other things the way that they should turn out.

[25 : 27] Okay? It's no good baking this cake of the body of Christ and putting in the wrong ingredients or putting in substitutes. You know, you bake a cake, well, I didn't use casting sugar, I used some other white stuff that I found in there.

You know, well, you know, I didn't use white chocolate, I used dark chocolate and suddenly the taste is completely different. Well, you can substitute these things, but if you substitute these things, you're not going to end up with a church that's shaped by the gospel.

You're going to end up with a church shaped by your definition of what you think love should look like or hospitality should look like. And so, if we want a church to look like the New Testament church in all of its glory or in its final glory, more importantly, it needs the right ingredients.

It needs the right type of love, the right type of hospitality, the right type of teaching, the right type of zeal. It needs God's mark on all these things if we are a church that's going to be shaped by the gospel.

So, there are things to be believed and things to be done here. the church, not just us individually, are to be shaped by the gospel.

[26 : 46] And that means the definition of genuine love is found in the gospel. And John says there's only one way that we know what genuine love is and that is Christ died for us.

Okay? We love him simply because and for no other reason than he loved us first. So, we're being brought back to genuine love and we're being brought back to the very mercies of God at the cross. I said on Wednesday evening that relationships can go from the simple to the complex. Okay? Some people have very simple relationships with each other simply because of the nature of those relationships.

Other relationships like marriages or perhaps jobs, they can be very complex. Okay? You have things to abide to, things to be done and they can get very difficult very easily.

The New Testament tells us that we're to grow up and be complete and the reason that the scriptures want us to be complete, God wants us to be complete, is because incompleteness is like holes in a relationship.

[27 : 55] Okay? And wherever there are holes in a relationship, it's like cliffs with no fences. There's nothing but danger on the other side. There's nothing but damage. And so the reason we're to be shaped by the gospel, the reason we are to be complete, is because it's dangerous not to be.

It's damaging to the church not to be complete. And so the reason we pursue prayer, trust, obedience, love God, Bible study, all these things that shape us, is so that we become complete in Christ.

Because incomplete people can't deal with complexities. Incomplete people are not in relationships that can endure because they don't have the necessary completeness to endure.

There may be other reasons why they endure, but they're not necessarily enduring in relationship. Okay? Being together doesn't mean that we are actually together.

And do you remember the thing that I said on the very evening that I was interviewed before I got the position in this church? Somebody asked me, what is your vision? What do you want to see happening? Do you remember my answer?

[29 : 03] You don't? Very simple. That I want the church to be like a bunch of grapes, not like a bag of marbles. Okay? I don't want us just to be together.

I want us to actually be together. Okay? There's two ways of being together and you can tell when you drop them. Okay? What's the saying? Together we stand, divided we fall, not for the Christian. Not for the Christian. Okay? John 15. If we are in the branch, if we are in the vine, then we are in the vine with each other. And therefore, we are together.

The church needs to be like a bunch of grapes, not like a bag of marbles. We not only need to be together, we need to be joined together. Okay? The church is a bunch, a complex relationship. And if we're not complete, that complexity can soon go very, very wrong. So let your love be genuine. Let your love be genuine.

[30 : 08] We need to put the right ingredients in to get the right result. If we're to be shaped by God, then we need to be shaped by God himself. So let me just say this as we close.

A couple of considerations. God creates unity in the church by making us all different. I want you to think about that.

God creates unity in the church by making us all different. And so, any boasting should stop. Any comparisons to the detriment of the individual or the body should also stop.

They should not happen. We are not here to say that one person is better than the other. we are here to demonstrate our gift in the body in the way that God would have us do it because he's not given it to the person next to us.

And what that means is this. That my strength may be your weakness. Okay? My strength may be your weakness. But my weakness may be your strength.

[31 : 13] Okay? My strength may be your weakness. But my weakness may be your strength. And God has ordained it that way to keep us together. Okay?

In the same way God created Adam and Eve, Eve was called the helper. The helper, not because she was an assistant to her husband, which I know that it has been read that way by a few.

It does not mean that she was an assistant at all. She was equal with her husband, but she was known as a helper. Why a helper? Well, if Eve could do what Adam could, then she's no help. Right? No help at all. Because I can't do it all by myself. A helper is only a helper if they're in a position of strength. Right? So that meant that Eve, or the woman, could do things that her husband could not do, and that's why he needed her.

And vice versa, it's true. Helpers help from a position of strength. Now that means they may be doing the same as you, but you've only got two hands, one mind, one mouth.

[32 : 19] There's a limit to what you can do, and God puts you with other people so that more can happen. So my weakness may be your strength, but my strength may be your weakness.

We are together for a reason. Okay? Because we're not all good at everything. So here's the exhortation. Remember this, that God is merciful, and in his mercy he has given you a future. And that future means that we are to be shaped by the gospel. We are to be shaped by God's grace and we are to act out of the measure of faith that God has given us.

The church should be a compatible union. The church should have no division in it. But we recognize that we live in a world and we can be conformed by it, even in the church.

Every gift comes with a corresponding responsibility. So you know what God has given you in sober judgment and in faith. But don't devoid that from the responsibility that comes with it.

[33 : 28] And don't change the responsibility. I spoke on Wednesday evening about pastors or internerant preachers that go from church to church to church preaching messages. messages bringing churches under conviction of what they should do or what they shouldn't do and next week they're not there to see whether or not they're actually doing it.

Okay? That disturbs me because you're taking the gift of teaching but you're not carrying with it the responsibility of being committed to the people that you're actually teaching.

You cannot devoid, separate those two. Now I don't know what your gift is but whatever it is I know what some of yours are because it's demonstrated in this church very, very clearly.

But you know deep down where God has given you a measure of faith to step out and do something. But step out with the responsibility that comes with that.

So remember this that in everything that we do whatever we do let our love be genuine. If we want to see the results that God has for his church that we need to put the right ingredients in.

[34 : 38] And the ingredients here is let your love be genuine. Whatever else is included this is first. Let our love be genuine.

And work this out in faith in sober judgment and in the measure of faith that God has given you.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. God, I'm going to exalt your name. You will reign and I will sing.

We lift our hearts to you. And we will worship, praise, and rectify.

[35 : 55] Your holy name. In God's splendor, you reign in glory.

Eternal King, you reign forever. Your word is mighty, releasing power.

Your love is mighty, you are my God. God of glory, we exalt your name.

Through the rain and I will sing. We lift our hearts to you.

And we will worship, praise, and rectify. And we will worship, praise, and rectify.

[37 : 14] And we will worship, praise, and rectify. Lord, you reign forever.

Your word is mighty, releasing power. Your love is risen, you are my God.

Father God, we thank you for your grace gifts to us.

And Father, we pray that we will be able to discern your will and live according to it. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Thank you.