

So what? \* Romans 12

May 1, 2022 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

This morning, we are going to wrap up our faithBasics series in the book of Romans by asking a very important question – ‘so what?’

Paul has told us some very important things in the first eight chapters of Romans:

We are all SINNERS, but we can all be SAVED by faith in Jesus. Once we are saved, we are SANCTIFIED – that is, we become more and more holy and Christ-like – but we acknowledge that it is a STRUGGLE. We are so used to living as sinners that we have to work hard to shift our thinking to live as saints. We’re not alone in that though; we have the very SPIRIT of God in us to help us to live God honouring lives and on top of that, we are forever SECURE in our faith because of God’s unfailing love for us.

Those are wonderful realities – they really are the basics of our faith – but we need to take one more step and ask ‘so what?’ What does that mean for us as we live in light of these things? How does this knowledge change how I act towards friends, family, neighbours, enemies?

And maybe even more importantly, what kind of response is appropriate, given the immensity of the grace God has given? How should what we believe shape how we behave?

To answer that question, we’re going to look at Romans chapter 12 because as it turns out, Paul is just as interested in the question of ‘so what?’ as we are. And Paul actually does this a lot in his letter writing; he’ll open his letter with a whole bunch of theology and then three quarters of the way in, he’ll shift gears and say ‘ok, let’s talk practically. Let’s talk about what this means for us as we live.’ He does that in a lot of his letters and Romans is really the classic example – chapters 1-11 is the big theological discussion and 12 to the end is the practical outworking of it. So we’re going to spend our time in Romans 12 today answering the question ‘so what?’ How should we respond to what God has already done?

Join me in Romans chapter 12 and we will answer that question. Romans 12, verse 1.

Now just a quick personal aside; this is another portion of the book of Romans that I love very deeply. This is a real corner piece in my faith and understanding of the Bible. In seminary, I actually wrote a twenty page paper on the first two verses of Romans alone – two verses – twenty pages – but I’m going to boil that down to the basics for you this morning.

So, Romans 12, starting in verse 1.

12:1 Therefore... Stop.

You know the saying, right? When you see a therefore, ask what it’s there for. Why is this ‘therefore’ here?

Paul puts a therefore here to say that everything he’s about to say is based on the truth of everything he’s already said. The ‘therefore’ that opens chapter 12 is the middle point on the teeter-totter that connects what he has said to what he’s going to say. And what he’s going to say is motivated by what he’s already said. And what has he already said?

We are sinners, saved by faith, sanctified, through the struggle by the power of the Spirit, held secure in God's love; in light of that – 'therefore' – in view of God's mercy – everything that we've just said about Romans 1-11 – I urge you, brothers and sisters, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship (or reasonable service, you might have in your Bible).

Paul says – God has loved us so much that while we were still SINNERS, Christ died for us. He didn't wait for us to get right with Him; instead, He came in the person of His Son Jesus to MAKE us right with Him. All by faith. Not by what we do, but by believing in what Jesus did.

How do you respond to grace like that? By coming to church when it's convenient? By coming to church every Sunday? By living every aspect of your life to honour God. Paul says that we respond to the grace of God by offering ourselves as living sacrifices, to honour God in all that we do.

Paul, I think is probably thinking about the 'dead sacrifices' that he made when he was a Jew; instead of that occasional, dead sacrifice, Paul says, make your whole, living, breathing, interacting with the world life one big act of sacrificial worship. That's how you respond to the grace of God – by living your life as an offering to Him. The last lines of 'When I survey' put it best – 'Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.'

And notice, this is not just a suggestion; Paul says I URGE you, I BESEECH you, I recognize that you have a choice over how you live your life but in view of what God has done, hear me when I say 'give yourself as a living sacrifice.'

BECAUSE... Paul says – this is your 'spiritual act of worship.'

Now the words that Paul uses here are tricky to translate – it's why I could write twenty pages on these seventy five words – but come with me because it's really important.

Paul says literally – in view of God's mercies, 'offering yourself as a living sacrifice' is your '*logiken latreian*.' A lot of translators, like the NIV in the pews, translate that 'your spiritual act of worship,' in contrast to the physical, animal sacrifices that the Jewish people made.

There's another way to translate it though, and you can probably hear it in the words '*logiken latreian*.' Do you hear that '*logike*'? It's where we get our word for logic, for reason, and so when Paul says that giving yourself as a living sacrifice is a *logiken latreian* in view of God's mercies, he's saying that the most logical, reasonable response to the mercies of God is to give yourself to him in worship.

'*Latreian*' is the word you would use to talk about things you do to glorify God, and so that's where the King James Version gets 'reasonable service,' the NET puts it the same way. Interestingly, the most recent NIV translation puts it like this – this is your 'true and proper worship;' all these ways to get at the idea that offering yourself as a living sacrifice is the most logical, reasonable way to respond to the mercies of God.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

So what? What does that mean for us as we live? It means that we should live our lives as living sacrifices, doing all that we do in worship and thanksgiving to Him. That is the only reasonable response to mercies like God's. Coming to church once a week is good, but it doesn't reflect the immensity of

what God has done for us. And so, in view of God's mercies, we are called to offer our whole selves to God as living sacrifices.

Now, admittedly, offering yourself as a living sacrifice is a little vague. I mean, you get the picture, right? The same way that a priest would offer a sacrifice to honour God, you offer yourself to God sacrificially so that all that you do would be honouring to Him. How do we do that exactly? What does that look like? I think Paul gives us some insight in verse 2.

2 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.

Paul says 'to be a living sacrifice, stop letting the world shape who you are and let the Spirit transform you from the inside out by the renewing of your mind.'

Now I don't know if you know this or not; I assume you do. We are all being shaped, every day, by the world around us: our co-workers, the shows we watch, the ads we see, the social media platforms we engage with. These things shape us. They shape our values and priorities and our sense of how the world works.

In some ways that's fine; we can learn some very important lessons from the world around us, but whenever Paul talks about 'the world' like this, he's not talking about the good stuff. He's talking about the stuff that falls short of God's glorious ideal.

And when that's the case, Paul says, stop being shaped by the world and instead, let the Spirit shape who you are.

He says 'be transformed' – the implication is that the Spirit is the one doing the transforming work – and He does that transformed work by renewing our minds. We allow the Spirit to come in and rearrange the furniture in our minds. We give Him permission to change our thinking and critique our sin and renew our values and priorities and understanding of the world, remaking them to reflect God's values and priorities and worldview, which are far and away superior to the world's.

It's only then that we can offer ourselves as living sacrifices. Because nobody with a worldly mind would give themselves over to honouring God; without Jesus, our minds are too busy looking for ways to honour ourselves. But when we allow the Spirit in to transform our thinking, then we can truly offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God.

And I think that if you slide down a few verses, Paul actually gives us some examples of what that looks like, being a living sacrifice that's shaped less by the world and more by God.

Look at verse 9 –

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Those are counter-cultural ideas, aren't they? Let love be genuine? There are whole tv shows devoted to superficial love. Think more highly of others than you do yourself? That's crazy! From a worldly point of view. But when the Spirit renews our minds, we can do this because we know that Jesus has already done it, for our benefit. Paul continues -

- 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.
- 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.
- 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.
- 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Again, not the way of the world. The world says 'if somebody does you wrong, you get 'em back with an angry Facebook post, or a personal vendetta or a law suit; but being shaped by the Spirit means being committed to being a blessing.

- 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.
- 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

I remember being in university where they said 'network, network, network; don't give your time to anyone who won't benefit you' and then I read this verse in my little Living Bible – "Don't try to act big. Don't try to get into the good graces of important people, but enjoy the company of ordinary folks. And don't think you know it all!"

There is value of course to networking, but I needed desperately to hear this call for humility when I first read it.

- 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.
- 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

That's a tall order isn't it? And there are some people who will just want to fight. But as far as you have anything to do with it, aim for peace. To the degree that Paul can say -

- 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord
- 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

That's big, isn't it? But that's what a renewed mind looks like. Let grace be your default and let God dish out justice. And finally, verse 21 –

- 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Put that on a post-it on your mirror in the morning; make it a screen saver on your phone. 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

That's what a Spirit-renewed, living sacrifice looks like – someone so full of grace that you overflow with goodness, acting more like the Lord than like the world at every step.

So... the first part of Romans tells us some pretty amazing things. They lay out God's mercies in very clear terms. So what? What does that mean for us? How should we respond to the mercies of God?

Let me put it to you like this and then I'll briefly unpack each clause – In view of God's mercies, offer yourself as a living sacrifice, letting your mind be shaped by the Spirit, and your actions be shaped by God's mercy.

In view of God's mercies – This is all because of what God has already done. We don't 'overcome evil with good' in order to get God to like us; when we were still sinners, He loved us and rescued us; we do what we do now in response to what God has already done. That's why I always say 'let's stand together as we respond' – the Bible tells us what God has done, my sermons should illuminate that, and then we sing together to let the Spirit work it into our hearts and prepare us to live in light of it out in the world. This is all a response, a reasonable service, in light of what God has done.

In view of God's mercies, offer yourself as a living sacrifice. This actually lines up with what Paul has already said. Remember back in chapter 6? Don't offer the parts of your body as instruments of wickedness, but use the whole of your body as an instrument of righteousness. Same idea. Offer yourself to God for His purposes.

Of course, the saying goes, 'the problem with living sacrifices is that they always climb off the altar.' Too true. Every day, we need to commit ourselves to living for God's glory, reminding ourselves to give ourselves to Him.

And you know what helps with that? The Holy Spirit. In view of God's mercies, we offer ourselves as living sacrifices, letting the Spirit shape our minds. Again, like chapter 8, the Spirit works in us to transform us from worldly people to godly people. Let Him do that work. Allow the Spirit to renew your mind.

But remember that you have a part to play in it to. Part of having a renewed mind is thinking carefully about what we put into our mind.

Imagine this bag represents your mind. When you put 'this' in, it looks like this. What you put 'that' in, it looks like that. What you put into it shapes what it looks like.

What are you putting into your mind? Because it's going to shape who you are. Is it contributing to your spiritual transformation? Or is it just conforming you to the world? I know that this is very different and we consume them in different ways, but just consider at a very broad level, how much Bible do you put into your mind, and how much media/social media do you put into your mind? It will shape what you look like. Let your thoughts and values and priorities be shaped by the Spirit.

In view of God's mercies, offer yourselves as a living sacrifice by letting the Spirit transform your mind, and the love of God transform your actions.

Again, this is all a response. Remember 1 John 4:19? We love because He first loved us. We are called to love in sacrificial and counter-cultural ways, because God has already loved us in countercultural and sacrificial ways. 'Love sincerely, don't be conceited, overcome evil with good' – these are all reflections of God's character and we do them because He did them first. We walk in His footsteps and let His actions shape ours.

In view of God's mercies, offer yourselves as a living sacrifice by letting the Spirit transform your mind, and the love of God transform your actions.