



Central
Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

In View of God's Mercies

Romans 12:1–8

Mark Mitchell

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series: Romans: Unashamed • Undeserved • Unstoppable

Good morning! Today's message is being shown on video at both our North and South campuses and some of you watching may not even know me. I'm Mark Mitchell, Lead Pastor at CPC and about once a month I preach to all three campuses from our Foster City campus. Maybe for some of you last Sunday was your first time at CPC and we especially want to welcome you back with us today.

We're a church that places a high value on the Bible, which we believe is God's Word. And so each Sunday we open it up. For the past few months we've been in the book of Romans, which is actually a letter the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome in 57 A.D.

If you're new here you're joining us at a perfect time to jump into this study. We've covered about two-thirds of the book and we come today to chapter 12. Here begins a whole new section of Romans that deals with practical, everyday living. Up until now Paul has been focusing on theology or what we call doctrine, especially as it relates the Gospel. But now he's focusing more on duty. This is a pattern we see in most of his letters. He begins by explaining doctrine and then he goes on and exhorts us to duty. Doctrine and duty go together in the Christian life. Christianity marries belief to behavior. Romans 1-11 deals with belief and Romans 12-16 deals with behavior.

In View of God's Mercies: Our Motivation

You can see that in how he begins chapter 12. Look what he says, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy..."* Stop there. This provides the basis for all he's going to say about how we live our lives. Everything he's about to tell us to do is "in view of God's mercy," which he's been explaining in chapters 1-11. This is important. Before he tells us **how** to live, he reminds of the **why**. He digs beneath behavior and gets to motive. In a moment he'll tell us what we can offer to God that will please him more than anything else. But why? Why offer him anything at all?

Some of us do it out of fear. Perhaps we fear we might lose our salvation. God will finally just say, "I've had enough. I'm done with you!" Or perhaps we fear God will inflict us with a terrible trial. But fear-based obedience loses its power over time. It may move you to great feats at first, but eventually it will exhaust you and you'll become too tired to even care. Fear-based obedience will also lead you to be less than transparent with God. You won't have the security to admit your sins for fear of reprisals

from him, so you do a lot of rationalizing and blaming. Fear-based obedience will also make it hard to endure trials because when they come you'll either think God is paying you back for doing bad things, or you'll get mad at God because you think you deserve better.

But when Paul says, "in view of God's mercy" he's saying we don't obey God out fear, but because of his great mercy. By the way, Paul uses the plural here, so it's more literally his mercies. For eleven chapters he's been unfolding God's mercies. The Gospel is God's mercy to undeserving sinners; he gave his Son to die for us; he made us righteous in his sight by faith; he sent his life-giving Spirit to dwell within us; and he promised us eternal glory. That is the "why" behind what we do.

So how should we respond to all his mercies? What should we offer to him that will please him more than anything else? The first 8 verses of Romans 12 answer that question.

In View of God's Mercies: Offer Your Body to God

Look what he says.

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 (v. 1).

With a sense of urgency, Paul issues a solemn charge. He uses terminology here from the Jewish temple. He pictures a worshipper at the temple who comes with an offering. Some of the offerings in the OT were called "sin offerings," where the blood of the animal was the basis for forgiveness. But we know Jesus is our sin offering. He shed his blood for us, he died for us, and we can't add anything to that. So Paul isn't picturing a sin offering here.

The second kind of offering was called a "whole burnt offering." You'd take an animal from your flock that had to be without defect, so it was a valuable asset, and you offered it to God. You couldn't offer God the leftovers. And the burnt offering was to be totally burnt, which represents complete devotion to God. That's what he's pointing to.

So in view of God's mercies, what are we to offer to God that will please him more than anything else? Not a dying animal, but our bodies as a living sacrifice. And just like the burnt offering was to be holy and without blemish, we're to be "holy and pleasing to God." He's not saying you have to clean yourself up before you

come to God. You're holy and pleasing to God because of what Jesus did for you.

To speak of our bodies this way is quite surprising. Why would God ever want my body? As I get older, my body gets harder and harder to put up with, much less look at! Why would God want this body? This would have also surprised Paul's Greco-Roman readers because they believed the body was negative and bad; to be truly spiritual you had to cultivate the soul. But God doesn't want a purely inward and abstract offering; he wants all we are; the totality of our being, including our bodies. We've already learned in Romans our sinfulness manifests itself through our bodies. In Romans 3 Paul wrote of tongues that practice deceit, lips that spread poison, mouths full of cursing, and feet swift to shed blood. He also said in chapter 6 to offer the members of our body as "*instruments of righteousness to God.*"

Paul calls this offering of our whole being to God "our true and proper worship." The Greek word Paul uses is *logican*, which means "logical" or "rational." He saying in light of God's mercies it makes total sense to do this. Once you understand God's mercies, anything less than complete sacrifice of yourself to God makes no sense! And this, he says, is what worship is all about. Worship isn't just coming to church and singing a few songs that make us feel close to God, it's offering all we are to God, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day.

Paul is calling for nothing less than total and complete commitment. He urges all the "brothers and sisters" in the church to do this, not just a few sold-out Christians. This past week I was at the gym talking with a friend who's part of CPC. He said something about how easy it is to become distracted from God in the midst of life. I said I struggle with that too. He looked at me and said, "You don't struggle with that. You're a pastor. You're totally dedicated to God." I said, "No, I do struggle with it." I know he didn't mean it; we sometimes think this is just something for pastors and missionaries. But this is for all of us. This is the normal Christian life. God wants all that we are—our time, our money, our talents, our family, our career, our hobbies. He wants us to be sold-out for him. He wants every part of our life on the altar.

One week after I gave my life to Christ I was brought to Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto. I'd never been inside anything but a Catholic church. Immediately I noticed words carved into the wood behind the stage: "You are not your own; you are bought with a price." It was a powerful message to a baby Christian that I no longer ran my own life. I belong to him. He owns me. It's so appropriate every worshipper saw that as they came to church, because that's the essence of worship. We're not our own. We're completely at God's disposal.

So every day we come to him and say, "Lord, here I am. I belong to you. Take me and use me in whatever way you want." But

that's not easy, so Paul wants to know in more detail **how** to do this. So he says,

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 (v. 2).

In other words, "If you're really going to bring your whole self to God, there are two things you need to continually do: First, "*Don't conform to the pattern of this world.*" Don't get squeezed into its mold. We tend to think that means we shouldn't do things like smoke or drink or watch R-rated movies. If you're really spiritual, you'll sell your TV and never do anything fun again.

There are a lot of believers who think like that. But those things have little to do with spirituality at all. In fact, I know people who've given up all of those things, and yet deep down they're still saturated by the spirit of the age. And that's what this word really means. Literally, it's "do not be conformed to the pattern of this age." He's talking about the philosophy of life that surrounds us on every side and keeps the whole world under the influence of the enemy. The spirit of this age is always the same. It's always about me. "What's in it for me?" It's about self-sovereignty. "I have the right to live my life however I want. I determine what's right and wrong." That is the spirit of the age. God says, "Don't get sucked into that kind of thinking! It's an approach to life that's twisted and distorted, don't be trapped by it."

But how do we do that? This leads to the second thing: "*But be transformed by the renewing of you mind.*" He's talking about an ongoing, daily renewal of how we think about life. It's only when we do that we'll be transformed. That word "transformed" comes from the Greek word *metamorpho*. It means transformation from the inside out, not just outward conformity. That takes place through the renewal of our mind. How is our mind renewed? It's renewed through the Word of God and the Spirit of God. In fact the Word of God is called "the sword of the Spirit." It's only as we read and meditate on the Scriptures the Spirit of God unmasks the lies the world feeds us and we're able to see what's true and real. It's only through the Spirit's application of God's Word to our hearts we see the insidiousness of our own fleshly nature. It's only when that happens we can discern his "good, pleasing and perfect will." Everyone asks, "What is God's will for my life." Well, you can't begin to know God's good and perfect will unless you let your mind be constantly renewed by God's Word. If you don't do that, you'll be duped by the world's way of thinking.

Now when our mind is being renewed and our lives are being transformed we'll give to God what pleases him more than anything—our whole lives as a living sacrifice. And when we do that it will change how we view ourselves in relation to other people. That's what Paul talks about next. In verses 3-8 he applies this principle of offering all we are to God to how we view ourselves

in relation to others, especially fellow believers. It's like, "You want to know what it looks like to be a living sacrifice? Well, let's start with your relationships in the body of Christ.

In View of God's Mercies: Use Your Gifts

Look how he starts out.

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 faith God has distributed to each of you (v. 3).

This appeal has the weight of apostolic authority behind it. That's what he means when he says, "For by the grace given to me..." He's talking about his gift of apostleship. With that authority, Paul tells us how to think about ourselves. First, he says don't think too highly of yourself. Lots of people have an over-estimation of themselves and what they contribute. We think too highly of ourselves when we think we can do everything, or what we do is more important than what others do. On the other hand, we can think too little of ourselves. We should think of ourselves with sober judgment. Many think mature Christians never think of themselves; they just think about others. But we're told here to think about ourselves, but to do so realistically. He says we should think of ourselves "in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you." Literally this should read "in accordance with the measure of faith God has measured to you." He's talking about the particular amount of faith he's given to each of us to carry out our calling in the church. We each are given a unique capacity to serve and we should function within that capacity.

This leads Paul into a discussion of spiritual gifts. Look what he says next.

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, according to the grace given to each of us (verses 4-6a).

Our role in the church is determined by the measure of faith God has given us to use our gifts. No one can boast about this because these are grace-gifts. But we also have to avoid the other extreme of thinking we have nothing to offer. We're part of the body of Christ. Just like our body is one but has many different parts which function differently, the body of Christ has many members with different functions. Every part is needed, but we're all still one.

Go watch a soccer match sometime. Watch as the ball is centered high by one of the wings. Watch as the center forward slips between two defenders, leaps high in the air, traps the ball on his chest, drops it on his left foot, flips it on to his right, glances at the goal, and with tremendous power shoots into the far left

corner out of the goalie's reach. How many members of his body were utilized in scoring that goal? We marvel at the wonder of the human body, each part working together in perfect coordination, and that's how the body of Christ functions.

There are a few things you should know about how spiritual gifts work within the body of Christ:

- First, every member of the body of Christ has at least one. The church was never meant to be run by paid professionals. The church is a body and it functions best when every member does his or her part. For almost 50 years that's been a core value of this church. We believe in the priesthood of all believers, which means through Christ not only do we have direct access to God, but also we each are called to minister.
- Second, God is the One who distributes these gifts. In other passages we're specifically told it is God the Holy Spirit who distributes the gifts as he wills. So we don't choose our gifts any more than we get to choose our brothers and sisters; they are given to us by God.
- Third, the purpose of the gifts is to build up the body of Christ. It's not just so we can draw attention to ourselves or feel good about ourselves. The focus or the attention should never be on us, but on God and how we can glorify him through building up his people.

This past week I got together with two other local pastors to play Bocce Ball. Bocce Ball is such a fun game, but it can be intense. And these are very competitive guys. I'm not, but they are! You'd think three pastors would be really nice to each other, but not so. When we played a few months ago I won, and so these guys were out to get me. And Bocce Ball is a game where it's all about me. There's no teamwork. If someone is closer to the Paoletti, you try to knock them away. It's ruthless.

The church is supposed to be different. In the church, it's not all about me, and it's not all about you. It's all about him and what he's doing in us and through us. Church is a team sport. There's no one up in the stands. Everyone's on the field—a band of brothers and sisters who help each other win and have each other's back.

Paul lists seven spiritual gifts in verses 6b-8.

If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

This particular list isn't exhaustive. Other gifts are listed in Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12, and 1 Peter 4. You should study these. The gist of what Paul says here is whatever gift you have, put it to use. That's why he says, "*If it is serving, then serve; if it*

is teaching, then teach; if it is to give encouragement, than give encouragement." We read that and want to go, "Well, duh!" But if you're not somehow serving in the body of Christ, you need to hear this. Put your gifts to use!

Another thing we see here is whatever gift you have, use it well. So he says, *"If your gift is prophecy, then prophecy in accordance with (in agreement with) your faith... If it is giving, give generously. If it is to lead, do it diligently. If it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."* We can allow our flesh to get in the way when it comes to our gifts. We can prophesy, but not in a way consistent with the faith. We can give, but hold something back. We can lead, but get tired and sloppy. We can show mercy, but let the problems of others drag us down. The gifts of the Spirit without the fruit of the Spirit are dangerous.

You might be wondering, well, how do I even know what my gifts are? It's a process, but you can start by asking yourself four questions:

- First, what do I love to do? If God has given you a gift, you'll be passionate about doing it. It will be your sweet spot. It won't feel like serving; it will feel like doing what you're made to do. It's like Eric Liddell said in *Chariots of Fire*, "I know that God has made me fast; and when I run I feel his pleasure."
- Second, what needs do I notice? Someone has put it this way, "What makes you pound your fist on the table?" When you look at the church or the world, what ticks you off? That's probably a good clue as to what your gifts and calling are.
- Third, what am I good at? You may have to develop your use of your gift, but somewhere along the line you'll find you're good at it.
- This goes along with the last question, what do others say? God gives us gifts not for ourselves but to build up the body, so ask others, what do I do that builds you up? Spiritual gifts are always discovered in community.

In many ways you discover your gifts in the same way you discovered your natural talents. If you're a musician, how did you discover your talent? You athletes, how did you discover your ability? You techies, how did you discover your techie-ness?

Usually it started by just being attracted to what someone else was doing. You're drawn to it; it interests you; you like what you see. You want to try it. And then as you begin, you may stumble at first, but you find you are good at it. Then others recognize that. They affirm you and maybe you find some way to sharpen that talent. Then opportunities come and you're in circulation.

It's the same way with spiritual gifts. I remember as a young man I was in awe of good preaching. Then I had a chance to teach a bible study and I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. At that point I thought I might have had the gift of teaching, but I don't think anyone around me had the gift of listening! But the more I taught the more it was apparent this was my gift. So I worked to develop that gift and God opened doors for me to use it. That's how you develop and discover your gifts. Don't wait until you know your gifts but jump into a ministry and try different things and God will make it clear to you.

One helpful tool we have on our website is a Spiritual Gifts Assessment. It's easy to take and that will help you identify some of your possible gifts. I'd also encourage you to take that and talk about your assessment with your CG leader or one of our pastors or Directors at CPC.

In a church worship service one Sunday the offering plate came to a little girl at the end of a row. She took the plate, put it down on the floor, and stood in it. When the usher asked what she was doing, she said, "In Sunday School I learned I was supposed to give myself to God."

She's so right. In view of God's mercies, what can we offer to God that will please him more than anything else? Offer the totality of yourself, including your gifts, to him.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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