

## **Romans 12:1-8 – True Worship**

We've reached the stage in our reading from the letter of the Apostle Paul to the Romans where the rubber hits the road. In our English Bibles we've read 11 chapters of explanations of the glorious message about Jesus. We have listened to the great themes of the Christian message:

that we humans live in God's world but reject his loving control of our lives and invent gods of our own – or worse still, give ourselves the place of God. This is true without exception. And God is rightly angry with such ungrateful rebellion. There's hell to pay because of this.

But instead of condemnation and judgement God himself has established a perfectly just way for the guilty to be acquitted and completely forgiven. Jesus. True God and True Man. Not dying under the curse of God for his own mistreatment and disobedience of God, for all testify to his absolute faithfulness to God. No, he died in our place, bearing our judgement in full.

And as the sign God had accepted his sacrifice and mercy could now flow to others, God raised him from the dead. So that for those who are in Christ Jesus "there is now no condemnation". Because of Jesus' death and resurrection for us, those who cast themselves on him know the sweet joy of mercy, not the fearful prospect of judgement. Mercy which we do not deserve is ours because of Jesus. Love which lays down no conditions is ours in Jesus. GRACE - God's Riches At Christ's Expense - is ours in Jesus alone. In Jesus we have peace with God now. In Jesus we have the certainty of eternity with God in the new creation. Nothing at all can separate us from that love. And it is no longer restricted to his ancient people the Jews, but is open to all humanity.

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This is what we know as the gospel of Christ.

This is what makes Christians Christians – we know God through his mercy showered on us in Jesus' death and resurrection.

And make no mistake. It is a completely free gift. It cost God, not us. It was paid for in full by another, not us.

But it changes everything. And it demands everything.

Romans 12:1&2 are the great gospel “therefore” of the book of Romans:

*Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. 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.*

Notice how it says that we are to offer sacrifices – and that this offering is “our spiritual act of worship” – “true worship”.

But did you notice that this offering of our bodies to God is not to gain anything from God, but because he has given everything to us – “in view of God's mercy”. We already have, in Jesus, the mercy of God.

But because it is like that, it changes everything. No longer using my body to satisfy my own ideas, longings and desires. But using my body to please God.

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And what does that look like?

It means I begin to think in a new way; my mind is renewed as I begin to listen to what God says firstly, about God himself. I no longer see him as a kind of cosmic Santa Claus I've got to keep on the good side of. He is now my majestic, almighty heavenly Father through Jesus;

I no longer see him as a kind of cosmic police officer ready to catch me out for any infringement. Now I know him to be the good and gracious and merciful Lord who understands my weakness and has raised me to new life in Jesus.

It means my mind is renewed, secondly, as I begin to listen to what God says about myself. I see I am now no longer living for myself; but for him who loved me and gave himself for me.

I am no longer thinking I am the most important person in the world, that I deserve acknowledgement that I deserve a good life; but I see myself now living as truly human in the unbreakable friendship of God.

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For some of us this “change of mind”, this “renewing of our mind” is hard work. For so long we’ve simply taken our cues about God, ourselves and life from what is called “the pattern of this world”. We’ve listened only to the voices of others, the teachings of our culture, our upbringing, the latest celebrity and never really listened to the voice of God. Simply, we’ve not really read or listened to our Bibles.

But God calls on us to renew our minds – to get God’s will in there. And it promises we will keep finding ourselves saying “Yes! that’s good!”, “Yes! That’s really the way it should be!” “That’s perfect!”

But experiencing the mercy of God in Jesus involves our bodies in relation to other bodies as well. That is, other people. And specially other people who are now our brothers and sisters in Christ.

When someone comes to Christ, they get a new family. They belong to a new body of people. And the mark of this family is not what can I get out of it but what can I put in?

So in verses 3 to 8 there is one of these lovely descriptions of the church which makes clear:

“church” is not a club or a hobby for those with a religious bent – it is the body of Christ designed to show what he is like and be a foretaste of heaven;

“church” means we belong to each other – the family of God is a full-time family rather than a once-a-week program;

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and God has given all of us a part to play – not so others will notice or praise us, but so the family, the body will be healthy and grow in likeness to the Lord Jesus himself.

When we say in Communion “We are the body of Christ” we are saying something that is extremely dear to the heart of God.

Please speak with me afterwards if you would like to know more about what it means to discover the mercy of God for yourself. He sent his Son to bring us as his body into being. His Son gave himself up for others – so that selflessness is the pattern of our relationships. That may mean big changes for some of us, but nothing less is true spiritual worship.