

Responding to God's Mercy Pt. 1

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Preacher: Devin Toh

[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we pray that we would come with open minds and humble hearts to receive your word today and be transformed by it. In Jesus' name, amen.

Well, let me ask you a question. Have you ever made a discovery that changed the way you live? Maybe a moment of clarity where, you know, things just started to fall into place and make sense.

I know I have. If you just go to the next slide. This is my great discovery. That's right. My life changed when I discovered sriracha chilli sauce.

They aren't paying me to say that. But when I tried it, it actually completely changed the way I ate and enjoyed my food. I remember I must have been about six or seven years old eating boring old two-minute noodles when suddenly I tried some of this sauce we had at home.

And that, for me, was one of those great moments of discovery. In the very next spoonful, I realised, wow, chilli and spice enhances every meal that I would have from that point on.

[1 : 05] And from then on, I responded to this great discovery by putting it on everything. Every dish I had had sriracha chilli sauce. At some points, I even thought I was eating more chilli sauce than the actual food itself.

That's how much I love this chilli sauce. Isn't it interesting how something as silly as chilli sauce can feel like so much of a game-changer? It may not be something as trivial as chilli sauce, but I wonder if you've ever made a life-altering discovery for yourself.

Something that really did change the way you live. Well, if you can't think of one, don't worry because we're going to be reminded of one today from Romans 12. And it's something better than chilli sauce.

It's actually God's great mercy. Chapter 12 today is going to show us that a true understanding of God's mercy is dramatically life-altering. Far more than chilli sauce, God's mercy in the gospel literally changes everything.

So look at me at the first word that you see in chapter 12. Therefore. Now this word actually marks a major turning point in Paul's letter. See, for 11 chapters, Paul has been teaching us that we were dead in our sins.

[2 : 18] All human beings have sinned and rebelled against God. And for that, we should be rightly judged and punished with death, both Jew and Gentile. But we've also heard that God in his great mercy sent his son Jesus Christ to atone for our sins so that we could be made right before a holy and a just God.

And as we grasp the depth of what it cost Jesus to make us right with God, it should bring out a response, shouldn't it? Knowing the reality of the salvation we possess because of Jesus, how can we go on living the same way?

No, everything should change, shouldn't it? And that's what the therefore represents here. It marks the turning point in Paul's letter from the declaration of God's mercy to now our response to God's mercy.

And everything in chapter 12 then hangs on the next phrase you see, in view of God's mercy. See, God's mercy colours everything Paul is going to exhort us to do in this chapter.

God's mercy is the very reason for everything that's going to follow here. And today, Paul is going to show us three ways that our lives should respond to God's great mercy in Christ. Firstly, by worshipping completely.

[3 : 31] Second, by serving humbly. And third, by loving unconditionally. So point one, responding to God's mercy by worshipping him completely. Look at verse one.

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.

Right, so having received God's mercy, Paul then calls us to offer up our bodies as a living sacrifice. And when Paul uses the word bodies here, he's actually saying that we give up our whole selves to God as a living sacrifice.

See, for the Jews at that time, animal sacrifices were normally killed by a priest at an altar as a sign of devotion to God, as you saw in our first reading. But now, because of God's great mercy in Jesus, Paul says that we are no longer to give animal sacrifices, no, but we're rather to give up our whole lives as living sacrifices to God.

Not to earn our salvation, but in thankful response for our salvation. Now, sometimes we can think that, you know, this concept of offering sacrifices on an altar is a little bit outdated.

[4 : 40] It doesn't really have much relevance for us today. But if you think about it, we are actually offering sacrifices all the time, aren't we? Everyone, whether you are Christian or not, is living for something.

We are constantly giving our lives over to something, something that we love. This could be our career, it could be our relationships, it could even be our hobbies. And for me, it's the Chelsea Football Club.

I love this team. I really, really love this team. I follow them to the point that when they lose, it just puts me in a bad mood for the rest of the day. I think mum will attest to that.

And just saying they've lost a lot this year. They've lost a lot. So, it has not been a good year for my emotional well-being. So, I have to ask myself, why am I so affected when I see them lose?

It's because I'm giving too much of my life away, isn't it? See, when we devote all of our emotional energy, our time, our resources to these things, we are offering up ourselves to them.

[5 : 44] Although these are all good things, we can quickly elevate them to a place that only God should occupy as top priority. But now, in view of God's mercy, our whole lives need to be an act of worship to God instead.

That means everything we do, at work, at home, when we rest, we ascribe greatest value and worth to God. So, now our lives are reoriented to please God through the decisions we make, through how we relate to other people, through how we spend our energy and our resources.

See, we don't just worship here on a Sunday, but we worship every day. Paul makes it clear here that all of life is worship. And by worship, we're not talking about some mindless experience, but we're talking about a mindful worship.

When Paul says that offering up our bodies in verse 1 is our true and proper worship, he literally means that this is a reasonable or a thoughtful act of worship. Not one where we get mysteriously entranced, but a rational, clear thinking about how we can please God in our lives.

It's a thinking worship. Paul goes on to explain what it looks like to offer up our bodies as a living sacrifice. Look at the first half of verse 2. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

[7 : 08] So we don't conform to the pattern of the world. Instead, no, our lives are to look radically distinct from the world. Paul in this letter has been teaching us that the world is naturally set against God.

Romans 1 says that the world follows its own desires and worships created things rather than the creator God. So as recipients of God's mercy, we are no longer to live by the values of the world and live according to its sinful desires.

But isn't this pull towards worldliness just really strong? It's so easy to conform, isn't it? We're just bombarded by the world's values everywhere we go.

We see it on TV, we see it at work, and even my natural self wants to conform to the pattern of the world. But the solution here is not to just grit our teeth and bear it by doing nothing, but to be positively transformed by the renewing of our minds in the other direction.

And when Paul uses the word transformed here, he has in mind a deep transformation of both character and conduct away from the desires of the world and into the image of Christ.

[8 : 16] And verse 2 says this transformation to be more like Christ happens by the renewing of our mind. See, in many ways, the battle against worldliness is one in the mind, isn't it?

As our minds are renewed by God's word, we start to think like he thinks, we start to value what he values, and our behavior follows. Our character and our conduct is then transformed to be more like Christ.

See, the outward transformation of our lives comes from the inward renewing of our minds. And what is the result of this? So that we can please God in every situation that we face, and in doing so, our whole life becomes worship to God.

Look at the second half of verse 2. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will. See, sometimes when we think about the will of God, we think it means predicting the future.

So who we should marry, what job we should take, but here, Paul simply means that renewing our minds by doing that, we can determine what is pleasing to God in every circumstance, what is good, pleasing, and perfect, how we can be godly in all of life.

[9 : 31] So that's why we care so much here about understanding and applying God's word. It's because that's where it starts. As we interact with God's word, our minds are renewed to worship God with our whole lives.

So we respond to God's mercy by worshipping completely. Which brings us to point two, we respond to God's mercy by serving humbly. See, up till now, Paul has talked about how the gospel is a gift that we receive, not something that we earned.

You'll see in Romans 9 that our salvation doesn't depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. And through the first 11 chapters, Paul has gone into great detail to show us that our salvation could never have been earned by being a good bloke or keeping the law.

But no, because of our sinfulness, we needed someone who would fulfill the requirements of the law on our behalf. And this is what Jesus has accomplished for us in the gospel.

So in light of all of that, how should we view ourselves? Well, look at verse 3. 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.

[10 : 45] So Paul is saying here, don't think of yourselves as better than you are, but think of yourselves with a sober or a proper assessment. We have to see ourselves for who we really are. Because God saved us completely out of his mercy, how can we then have an inflated view of ourselves?

And the measure of faith distributed by God here could refer to either our faith in Jesus or the gifts that he's given us, but either way, it's all from God. So we have no right to boast, but instead we ought to be humble.

And Paul says that this humility is to be seen by how I serve my church, looking to the needs of others rather than my own needs. Look at verses 4 and 5. For just of us, 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.

So Paul is saying here that we need the humility to recognize that we belong together. We need each other. And this means that we have an obligation to serve each other within the body. See, sometimes I can come to church with this attitude that church exists for me, for my needs, what I want to get out of this service.

At my old church, I occasionally led the music team on Sundays and I was a pretty new Christian at the time when I was doing this. And I remember that I had to pick songs to sing on Sundays.

[12 : 11] But when I would do that, I would just choose all of my favorite songs. Every time, I'd just choose all my favorite songs to sing. And I wouldn't really have much regard to what would actually be helpful for the congregation.

Not very humble, right? See, looking back, I had turned a significant ministry into a karaoke session for one person. But actually, Paul is saying here that we don't exist for ourselves.

No, we exist to serve others. The very way God has shaped us by giving us these different gifts is given to us for the purpose that we would use it for the benefit of the body. And our ministry should reflect that.

And that's why serving at church is so important. It's because this is where we get to exercise our gifts for the good of the body. And as we use our different gifts, we can function as how God really intended us to, serving the needs of others as one family or body in Christ.

So with this in mind, Paul says, whatever gifts you have, use them. Use them lots. Work hard at them for the benefit of the body. Look at verses six to eight. We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us.

[13 : 23] If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith. If it's serving, then serve. If it's teaching, then teach. If it's to encourage, then give encouragement. If it's giving, then give generously.

If it's to lead, do it diligently. If it's to show mercy, do it cheerfully. At my old job, my old job spent a lot of money researching the value of diversity.

And the outcome of that research was that a team of diverse individuals with different skill sets and backgrounds would consistently produce better work results than a team made up of similar individuals with similar backgrounds.

And recognizing that diversity actually led to better work enabled the firm to actually make heaps and heaps of cash. And in the same way, we need to recognize the value of diversity within the body.

See, God has given us different gifts so that we could serve each other more effectively, not to make loads of cash, but to grow the body of Christ. And although the list of gifts mentioned here is not exhaustive, see that it includes gifts that require people to be up the front and also ones that need to be done in the background too.

[14 : 31] But Paul doesn't really elevate any one of these gifts above each other, does he? Each make a vital contribution in their own way to the body. So I want you to be encouraged by this.

See, you may think you're not that important, but you are important. See, we need you just as you need us. In fact, Paul puts it more strongly than that. He says that we belong to each other in verse 5.

See, each of us has been placed in this community by God for a purpose. The gospel drives us into humble service for the good of the body. Okay, so we've seen how God's mercy, we respond to God's mercy by worshipping him completely and serving humbly.

And lastly, we will see how God's mercy enables me to love unconditionally. And as we go through this last section, Paul spells out two contexts in which we love each other. Our love towards believers and unbelievers, those who support Christ and those who oppose Christ so that our love would be truly unconditional.

Firstly, in relation to believers, look at verses 9 to 10. Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.

[15 : 45] false. So as recipients of the gospel, our love needs to be sincere, not hypocritical or false. Paul wants us to make sure that our outward display of love, that that outward display of love actually reflects the inward and the true nature of God's love for us.

See, sincere love here means clinging to what is good, being devoted to one another and putting others first. In this way, we're called to possess a deep commitment to meet the needs of others and see them grow.

as Christians. And this sounds great, doesn't it? But isn't this type of love so hard to live out? I know for me, a lot of my service comes out of convenience.

So I help people and I serve them when it suits me and is within my comfort zone. I remember many times in the past when people asked me to do things that are hard or difficult, I would respond with a, oh, yeah, I'll see how I go or, oh, let's play it by ear, I'll see how I feel on the day when really I'd have no intention of helping them out at all.

I wonder if you can relate to that. That's a hypocritical love, isn't it? It's just convenience covered up by the pretense of love. But as we begin to love genuinely, suddenly their needs take precedence over mine.

[17 : 07] Suddenly I start serving people whether it's easy for me to do that or not. See, genuine love is always driving me beyond what is convenient and starts to become sacrificial. A living sacrifice for their good and their growth.

However, not only is our love to be directed at other believers, but also our love extends to outsiders or unbelievers even to those who might oppose us or our faith.

And from what we can see around us, this world is becoming increasingly anti-Christian, isn't it? We're starting to face a lot of ridicule for the things that we believe in. And what's funny is that in a world that emphasizes tolerance and acceptance of all things, this world is becoming increasingly intolerant of Christians.

And though we might not be experiencing this overt persecution that Paul and the early Christians might have been facing in Rome, how we respond to even the most veiled or subtle jibes actually reveals our understanding of God's mercy in the gospel.

So how should we react to this opposition? Look at verse 14. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. So it's just not that we're to hold ourselves back from cursing, but Paul actually exhorts us to take positive action to bless.

[18 : 27] Just as we were once enemies of God yet have received mercy from him, we do extend that same mercy to our enemies. We respond in a way here consistent with how Christ was merciful to us.

So Paul urges us in verses 17 to 19. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, it is mine to revenge, I will repay, says the Lord. Okay, so we don't retaliate, but we respond in ways that promote peace and reconciliation to the extent that we can.

Although it's hard always to control the actions of those who oppose us, we can't do that sometimes, we do everything we can to maintain peace. And that means not taking justice into our own hands in verse 19, but leaving it to the justice and the judgment of God.

So here we're able to live at peace with others because we know that God is a righteous judge who will administer justice fairly, so we don't need to. See, that's God's role, not our role.

[19 : 39] But Paul describes our role in verse 20. 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.

This is a bit strange, isn't it? So we're to care for our enemies, we're to provide for their needs in a way that blesses them, but in doing that, we will heap burning coals on their head.

Now I've never had burning coals heaped on my head before, but quite frankly, I'm not that curious to find out what that's like. But before you get all excited and think this is really your chance to make your enemies burn, don't see this as a loophole.

It's not a loophole to get a little bit of revenge in. After all, we've just been told that love must be sincere. Rather, the intention is verse 21. Do not let evil overcome you.

Overcome evil by doing good. You see, loving and heaping burning coals on their heads is a way of shaming them into repentance so that they too might be saved.

[20 : 43] And this is a good thing, isn't it? It's a great thing. And that is truly overcoming evil with good. And isn't that just a beautiful picture of the gospel?

See, the gospel is the great outworking of evil being overcome by good. See, where we were doers of evil, God in his love sent his only son to die for us, to show us a love that is truly unconditional, no matter how we treated him.

And once we truly understand the depth of God's unconditional love for us at the cross, love for us, it really does make us repent and place our faith in God.

Unconditional love overcomes evil. So this is a lot to take in, isn't it? Doesn't it seem like this is an incredibly high bar for our lives?

We're to worship God completely, we're to serve humbly, and we're to love unconditionally. And it just seems so difficult to live out, let alone me even finding the desire to actually want to do these things.

[21 : 46] Many of us have been hurt and have really experienced deep emotional scars because of how others might have treated us. So we need to return to the message of God's mercy in Christ.

And remember that Jesus was all these things. He was the one who worshipped his father completely, even to death on a cross. He served humbly, and he loved us unconditionally.

So what other response is right? What other than total obedience does he deserve? And when we grasp the reality of God's mercy, living in this way starts to become a delight.

No longer do we see this as a burden, but as a privilege of having the opportunity to reflect the very heart of our Lord Jesus. When my dad was sick in hospital, it was just a really stressful time for the whole family.

And we basically had to live out of hospital for a week. But during that time, one of my best mates from Sydney actually flew down to help and support us. And it was a great act of kindness and mercy.

[22 : 53] See, I didn't know at the time, but it was actually a really busy period for him in Sydney too. Bible college assignments were due, and he had a lot of other responsibilities on. And he didn't have that much money either.

But he actually rearranged everything and spent what he had so that he could come and support us. He really gave up a lot to be with us. And so it turned out to be an even greater act of kindness and mercy than I'd first realized.

And this is something that I'm never going to forget. But God's mercy in Christ is greater still. So how much more should we not forget that, but instead keep responding to it by worshipping completely, by serving humbly, and loving unconditionally?

Let's pray now that we would. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your great mercy in sending your son Jesus to die, taking the punishment for our sins, and rising again for our new life.

May we respond rightly to this. Help the reality of your mercy sink deeper into our hearts, that it would transform our minds and our actions. We pray that giving our lives to you would become our joy and our delight.

[24 : 09] In Jesus' name. Amen.