

# Embodying Grace & Peace | How to Be the Church

## “Being Transformed”

Romans 11.30-12.2

5.15.22

*11.30 For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience,<sup>31</sup> so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. <sup>32</sup> For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. <sup>33</sup> Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! <sup>34</sup> For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? <sup>35</sup> Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? <sup>36</sup> For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*

*12.1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

**We're looking at how God, the Holy Spirit, works in the Church.** This is the season of Pentecost (June 5) and time to celebrate the Spirit producing fruit ((Gal 5.22-23) in the lives of people... uniting them into worshipping groups of real flesh-and-blood believers, reconciled to God and living in community with one another – sometimes former enemies now united as a family.

These local churches are God's strategy for showing the world a new and living way (Eph 3.10) – the Church is God's great apologetic (John 13.35), the great defense of the faith and a real evidence of Christ's resurrection: the transformed lives of people living in love – embodying grace and peace for the world to see.

We move now to this amazing chapter on the Spirit – Romans CH 8 - where we saw the outlandish security that belongs to all believers in Jesus and how the Spirit uses that security as an engine for change and liberation. Today, we hitch that engine to this intense description of HOW TO BE THE CHURCH in Romans CH 12... We skipped over a few chapters so we want to address that section today... but...

Mainly, we're asking questions about distinctively Christian or Gospel morals: IF we're given righteousness as a gift, if believers are declared justified in the sight of God because of what Jesus Christ DID which we receive by resting and receiving (i.e. passively and freely) THEN why

should we be good? Why should we change? HOW should we go about changing and what would that change look like in the lives of real people?

As we come into this chapter on Gospel-morals, let's look at:

- 1) Musing on Mystery**
- 2) Mercies to Morals**
- 3) The Morals Mercy Makes**

The section we skipped addresses specific questions about Israel and its status and destiny after the coming of Jesus Christ. It's heavy stuff and it should probably be taught in a more question and answer way... BUT, suffice it to say for NOW – Paul reflects on Israel's spiritual failings and the fact that the Jewish people are not turning "en masse" to Christ.

Basically he's saying that Gentiles need mercy AND so do Jewish people – all are on equal footing, all are shut up in disobedience so that God can show mercy to ALL nations – Jew and Gentile alike... but mercy can only be shown to the disobedient, to those who NEED mercy and can't rely on their deserving AND now the Jewish people are more evidently disobedient AND SO ARE IN A BETTER POSITION to see their need for mercy...

And by the time Paul concludes this whole dense section, he's ...sort of... blown away! God saves ONLY by mercy and God is showing all people to be needy of mercy so God can show mercy to all kinds of people! God LOVES to show mercy – it's the thing God most admires about Himself ("God's darling attribute" - Watson).

When Paul sees it all unfolding in a flood of mercy for all nations, Paul erupts into admiration for God – he muses on the mystery of God's plan and breaks out into praise, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen. (33-36)

We THINK pondering the deeper things of God and reflecting on mystery and ruminating on complex theological questions can't DO much for us BUT if we do it the right way (1 Cor 8.1) it can kindle wonder in our souls... and we say, "OH!..." (See it in v. 33?) And suddenly information becomes FORMATION and awe leads to what the North African Church Father, Augustin called, "*retentio, contemplatio, dilectio.*"

In meditation, we retain the knowledge of God's deeper things – mysteries revealed in Christ – and then the Spirit takes that knowledge and focuses the mind of the believer on it so that it expands our view of God and it turns to "dilectio" – it becomes delectable or delightful and we say, "OH!... God is better than I thought!"

That's what is happening to Paul and it catapults him into this next chapter with the word, "Therefore..."

He's inviting us to join him in this delectable moment when the mercy of God becomes NOT just a cold concept or teaching we use to feel superior to others but ...it becomes...delicious! It thrills us – (like the old hymn): "sometimes a light surprises the Christian while he prays" (William Cowper, 1779).

"Therefore..." says Paul... "in light of everything we've been saying that has culminated in this blaze of "OH! The depths of God... From Him, through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

Paul is modeling for us...how musing on mystery leads to "dilectio" and then to change and liberation from things that ruin life and are not pleasing to God.

It's not that every time the believer in Jesus sits down to read the Bible that there's this flare-up of, "WOW! God is greater than I THOUGHT!" but that SOMETIMES a light surprises... and especially as we read and worship and sing...the Spirit testifies within us, "Abba, Father!" and ESPECIALLY as we muse on the mystery of mercy – sometimes it becomes delicious!

"Therefore..." says Paul, "In light of all God's mercies (plural), His compassion and forgiveness, His taking on flesh in Jesus Christ in order to live the life I was required to live (but I didn't even come close); the Incarnate God, Jesus Christ, lived the life of pure and simple LOVE to people and toward God, the Father... He lived IN MY PLACE, FOR me. That I, *"being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a sacrifice for sin by His blood through faith"* (Rom 3.24-25) I'm righteous in God's sight!"

"His adoption, His turning rebel slaves into privileged sons and His mysteriously coming, by His almighty Spirit to LIVE inside of YOU... THEREFORE, says Paul, "I come alongside you to say, BROTHERS and SISTERS – by the mercies of God, present your individual bodies as one corporate sacrifice to God."

Let the whole congregation of believers be ONE (singular) living, holy, acceptable sacrifice to God – THIS is your "λογικός" (i.e. spiritual or logical or corresponding and fitting) service of worship."

If you GET the mercy of God... if it dawns on you and flares up in you so you have a spiritual sense of it – then you'll see that YOU HAVE BEEN BOUGHT with a price and should therefore honor God with your whole self – your body, your mind, your will.

This is the delectable alchemy God does in the whole person of those who believe. And every time it dawns on you afresh – it seems to make more and better sense – the LOGIC of it is undeniable.

Don't be conformed to the world – that whole rat race of always trying to prove yourself and show how smart and beautiful and qualified and good and interesting you ARE – as if it's all up to YOU to justify your own existence BY YOUR DESERVING!

No! Don't give in to that! It's NOT by your deserving but instead by GOD'S MERCY! And this is the Divine Alchemy that turns the LEAD of our souls into the Gold of GRACE for a world in need.

This is how Gospel-Morals come about: the eternal plan of God to give mercy to the disobedient and grace to the disqualified and when you get it more and more...deeper and deeper...eyes open to what the mercies of God are...when the Spirit turns on the light so you are more “able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, THEN you become filled up to all the fullness of God.” (Eph 3.18-19)

See, the apostles are going to issue a lot of commands (this whole chapter is full of do's and don'ts) but they're ALWAYS connected to the Engine and without the Engine – the truth and the sense that YOU ARE UNDER THE MERCIES of God in Christ, you cannot ... WE cannot live as the Body of Christ in the world! Christian morals from Christ's mercies!

And when the mercy of God is fresh to us... as we live repenting and believing...turning again and again to Jesus with our need and in light of His LOVE of meeting our needs... He, THĒ Living sacrifice, whose sacrifice unto death makes US alive...He is present to the world THROUGH His Body – the Church!

We begin to know how to conduct ourselves, not simply as so many separate bodies... but as ONE living sacrifice! We begin to prove what the will of God is – that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (v. 2) we become a corporate expression of Jesus to the watching world. Something much more than people who keep the Law – but who live by grace...and demonstrate sacrificial love for God, for one another and for our neighbors: a life of worship.

This is the “life of daily renewal” (Richard Lovelace) that God has for His children, in Christ, by the Spirit.

Now if MERCY leads to morals (not the other way around) what will the morals look like?

Well, that's where we're going in this chapter: how to BE the Church in the modern world – all these imperatives that follow in CH 12 (but always connected to the Engine of CH 8 – not under

the Law's condemnation, not slaves but sons, not able to be separated from God's love, no condemnation) – but here's a little preview.

First, it's more CORPORATE than you think. We're in South Florida where everyone is on his/her own individual, separate, private journey – and there's an aspect of that in true gospel spirituality (each person – as we said last week – must close with Christ!) but Paul wants us to see that our individual bodies make up ONE living sacrifice. Christianity is corporate!

I think you'll be surprised at how important real relationships are to Gospel-Life. We're IN IT together which is fantastic... unless... you're in it by yourself and then you may THINK that joining a church and engaging in real relationships with others...who are strangers to you...YOU THINK IT'LL CRAMP YOUR STYLE and be restrictive and even a little weird...

Well, that's one very real facet of what it means to conformed to this world – and what you learn as you live in the light of God's mercies is that dying to yourself leads to REAL LIFE – and being IN THE BODY of Christ is actually the path to self-realization.

Each of us who have indeed closed with Christ and do believe – each of us is an organ – I mean like a part of a Body (e.g. lungs or hand or eye or kidneys) and if you “dis-member” a body the individual parts or “members” begin to die. They cannot realize their purpose or function by themselves. So this is yet another illustration of Jesus Christ's words: “whoever loses his life will find it.” (Luke 17.33)

Second, this is logical or fitting or appropriate. The life drenched in the mercies of God seeks expression in becoming a living sacrifice. I'm not saying it's easy (they say the problem with LIVING sacrifices is that they try to crawl off the altar!) but the Love of Christ compels you in this direction. HE was a Sacrifice and IN HIM, you will be unhappy if you are not like Him.

It's not a catch... in other words, we're not saying, “Well, your saved by grace – totally free – paid for by someone else – but NOW, you better get busy!”

What we're saying is, “God plants this DNA in you – that you were bought by a sacrifice and IN Christ, you also become a sacrifice AND to move in that direction is NOT A SHOW OF GRATITUDE (as if you're paying back what God gave you) but a kind of instinct – it's fitting, logical, the IMPULSE of the Spirit.

Last, and there's much more we COULD say, but note the “Body” AND “the Mind” in the passage. We present our whole self to God and to one another. We embody grace and peace to the world – we're physical (not disembodied spirits). That's why, if you're watching us at home, please come back – we want your BODY to be with us...

And your mind... We live in a world that's always trying to "squeeze us into its mould" (J.B. Phillips) and you MAY think that means – don't be mean and selfish...don't have sex outside of marriage, don't curse or use cocaine – all good ideas... but don't put the cart before the horse. Focus on believing...on TRUST.

It's more about being Mercy People – it's about being fixated on God's plan...on YOUR undeserving and His doing everything to pay your debt, and BE the "enough" that you could never be...

Being liberated from self-fixation (being blessedly self-forgetful comes, little by little) but the main thing is the mercy of God. Being conformed to the world is to forget about God and His mercy – and being transformed by the renewing of your mind is to be fixated on God and His mercies... *"For from Him, through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."*