

Romans Chapter 12

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Preacher: Robin Singleton

[0 : 00] 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. 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.

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, and according with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

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. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith. If it is serving, then serve.

[1 : 01] If it is teaching, then teach. If it is encouraging, 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.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Sharing with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you.

Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.

Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. 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.

[2 : 05] Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, it is mine to avenge. I will repay, says the Lord. 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. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Good evening.

Well, good evening. Good to be with you again. A few really important things have happened since I was here last. One is that I've started wearing glasses all the time, which saves me all the on and off with glasses, but means I might look a bit sort of dazed at times.

And the other thing, of course, is that we've got a famous person in the audience, haven't we? We watched Bake Off and cheered along as David won on. Some did to David as well. Yeah, that's right, yeah.

We saw you, though. We saw you. So congratulations to David. I wonder what you think when you hear the word worship.

[3 : 18] Perhaps you think of a time of singing. People might talk about a time of worship. Or they might ask the question.

Someone's come in or gone to another church or gone to a conference or something, and someone might say, what was the worship like? And I guess what they mean is the singing.

Or we might talk about a place or a time of coming together to worship, attending worship. So, you know, Sunday worship, in that sense. And both of those ideas of singing and of meeting together have biblical support.

Psalms 100 and verse 2 talks about come with singing to worship. And there's certainly a sense of gathering. And many times in the Bible it talks about coming and gathering to worship.

Worship. But I wonder if you've ever thought about Romans chapter 12 when you've been thinking of, well, what does worship actually mean?

[4 : 21] What it says in Romans chapter 12 and verse 1 is that worship is offering your body as a living sacrifice.

Offering your body as a living sacrifice. And worship, if you continue to read, is about what is holy and pleasing to God.

Which is rather challenging because sometimes we speak about worship and particularly the issue of singing in a rather different way. We talk about whether it pleased us. So when we say to someone or someone says to us, what was the worship like?

The implication is that we can judge whether it feels good or whether it was particularly your style or you're excited by it. But that's not. The central point of worship is that it's directed to God and it's to be pleasing in his sight.

Worship is not for you. It brings joy. But it's for God primarily. And Romans chapter 12 and verse 2 begins to explain how that works out.

[5 : 37] That we are not to be conformed to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Not to be conformed into the way the world is thinking.

And I don't know you, but over the years and still at church, we've got like a thing. And even the older kids like playing with Play-Doh. I guess if it's ever in your house, you probably like having a poke and a push as well.

But it's that idea of something being conformed and moulded. And we've got one of these like press things where you can put the Play-Doh in one end and you squeeze a handle and the Play-Doh squirts out in a particular shape.

You can change the shape and it's quite good fun. It keeps me happy for many hours. But that's the idea that the world wants to push you into its shape.

And the Lord is saying, you must not be conformed, squashed into the pattern of this world. Rather be transformed by the renewing of your mind into what God wants you to be.

[6 : 40] He wants to mould you and he wants to make you in his likeness. Now when we come to the rest of chapter 12, we find that Paul is about to spring into a whole load of application.

And to think about this, we need to take a few paces backwards. In fact, what you could say is Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2 is like a hinge for the whole of Romans. There's all that's before Romans 12 is one part.

And then there's this hinge in Romans 12, 1 and 2. And then there's all of the application in the second part of Romans. So what we find in the beginning of Romans as you read through it, and if it's not a book you're familiar with, I'd encourage you to read it because it spells out the gospel message.

He starts by convincing us, and it's very convincing, that we're sinners. And that we fall far short of God's standard. He shows that it doesn't matter whether you're a Jew or a Gentile.

But that you are a sinner far from God. And that there is a desperate situation that you're in, that you even can't do anything about it. You can't change yourself.

[7 : 55] And it speaks about God as the righteous judge. It speaks about the need for righteousness. And it speaks about the only way to be a person that can have our sin dealt with is to be someone who comes to Christ in faith.

Who believes what Jesus did on the cross was for them. And later on, as we share in the bread and the wine, we'll be remembering what Christ has done for us.

The person that accepts that Jesus, when he hung on the cross, bore your sin, bore our sin. The person that believes that that's why Christ died.

That he was doing it for you, in your place. Bearing the anger and wrath of God against sin. That the person who believes these things, and puts their trust and their faith in him, is someone who we can say is a Christian.

Someone who is born again. Someone who is following the Lord Jesus. And simply, through those beginning books. And yes, there's lots of argument.

[9 : 04] But the message is simple. Paul is saying, as he writes to these Christians in Rome, this is the gospel. This is what you need to understand. This is the problem that you face with your sin.

This is the remedy. This is the Lord Jesus. This is what he's done for you. And simply, you need to put your faith and your trust in him. He deals with a few other issues on the way. And particularly towards chapters 10 and 11, he comes back to dealing with the Jews and how that fits into the story.

But then he comes to Romans chapter 12. And he's beginning to say, if you notice, the first word is, therefore. And as someone said, when you read the word therefore, it's there for a reason.

Listen. He's saying, if this is what God has done for you as you trust in him, this is what needs to happen in the future.

If this is what you believe, then I urge you, brothers, he says, in view of God's mercy, in view of the way that he has loved you despite your sin, in view of the way that he saved you from hell, in view of the way that he's given you an inheritance that will never perish or spoil or fade, in view of these wonderful things that God has done, your life needs to change.

[10 : 23] And so you see that the swing, the hinge swings, or another way of thinking about it is a seesaw. You know, you're walking up one side of the seesaw. I know you're not supposed to walk on seesaws, but just follow me with the purpose for the illustration.

You walk up a seesaw and you get to the point at which it starts to tip. You've understood the gospel. You've begun to trust in the Lord Jesus. And now it's like the seesaw tips.

And now the rubber hits the road. How are you going to live now? What's it going to be like? What's the difference going to make to you? What effect does this faith have on my life?

And what struck me, I wonder actually, those of you that have been Christians a long while and been reading your Bible for many years, I wonder if you'd have been able to tell me what was after Romans 12, 1 and 2.

I guess a lot of you would have known those two verses. But what we're going to be thinking about this evening mainly is the next section from 3 to 21. Because what follows is mainly about how we live out our faith in community.

[11 : 30] So gospel is central. We've had 11 chapters of gospel, what it means to know Christ and to follow him, what it means to be saved. And now, just after he's turned the corner and started to apply this, he starts to say, okay, so how does it work out in our relationships, one with another?

We call the church in Loftus, Grace Community Church. And of course, we want it to symbol a sense of being part of the community.

But really what we're saying is we are a community. This is a community of believers. The church is not the building, it's the people, and we are a community. Another way of visualizing it, if you like a visual idea, is just think of the Lord Jesus with his arms outstretched, standing in the middle of our building here.

And for all of you who have put your trust in him, he draws you to himself. And as you come to him, as you gather around him, not only are you there confronted with the living Christ, you've placed your faith in him.

He's a delight to you. It's wonderful to see him face to face, but it's also brought you shoulder to shoulder with everybody else. And that's what the gospel does.

[12 : 54] It not only transforms us as an individual, it transforms our relationships with one another. That's what it is to be church, to be a community of God's people. And to think about community for a while, it's helpful for us to notice the difference between a business relationship and a family relationship.

We're going to find that there is often in the Bible a connection with family. But often in the church, our minds tend to fall towards business.

Here's an example. Having a meal. You go to a restaurant. And in a restaurant, you're paying.

So you're the customer. You're the king. You decide what you want. You can complain if it's not what you like. You can demand. Everything's done for you.

If you really want, you can click your fingers and ask for the waiter, but you're the king. But a family is very different. Just try clicking your fingers at the next family meal when you want something to change.

[14 : 15] If you want something done, you probably do it yourself. You probably set the table. You probably move the table. You lay the table. You serve the food. You help get drinks. You pass the salt.

You want the ketchup? Well, go and get it yourself. It's in the fridge. You collect the plates. You clear the table. You wash the dishes. This is the difference between a business relationship where you're paying and you order and you claim and you consume and a family type of relationship where you serve.

You meet one another's needs. You care about one another. And that just simple illustration shows up in many churches, doesn't it? That we must not come to church as if it's something that we're consuming.

As if we've got like a minion. We're pressing the button on our remote control and we want the church to be exactly what we like. Rather, we come with an attitude of service, of love, of being willing to give for others.

A church is not something that you come to or you do. A church is who you are, who you belong to. The church is a family where you look out for one another, where you're seeking places to serve and to share and to care.

[15 : 34] And so, with this sort of illustration in mind, I want to turn your attention to the rest of this chapter, Romans chapter 12. And it's worthy of very close study and it's worthy of much more attention than I can give it just in these few minutes today.

But I'm going to direct your thoughts to just a few parts of Romans chapter 12 with some challenges to help us to think about what it is to be church.

And remember, this all starts with a therefore. This all starts with who you are before the Lord Jesus. This all starts with faith in Christ and trusting in Him.

And if that is what you've done, then there are three things that I've picked out that I want you to think about this evening. How could we summarize the nature of being the church?

What does worship look like? What does it mean not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind in community life? Often when we read those verses, I guess like me, you would have often thought just about personal.

[16 : 52] But this is about community and you'll see it's spelled out in these verses. Firstly, I want to say that it's about belonging. So Romans chapter 12 and verse 5 says, So in Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others.

Belonging to all the others. Now this isn't about owning one another. This is about dependence on one another. A mutual dependence. Literally, the Greek reads like this.

If you were just to transliterate the Greek it would come out in English like this. So the many one body we are in Christ and individually one of another members.

We're members of one another. the people who form the church of Christ are members of one another. We're dependent upon one another in the fact that we are one body.

And just like the human body each member has a part to play so too in the church. The church needs all of the people to be playing their part in order to be the church fully.

[18 : 12] Of course an ear can't talk. A mouth can't hear. We need to be together and serving one another and living for one another in order for the body to work.

Remember too what I said about the difference between a family meal and a meal in a restaurant. A consumer meal. In a family we need one another. No one should be acting like a consumer in the church enjoying the ride as it were.

How does this work when we apply it to our life here as a church in Whitby or for us as a church in Loftus? It reminds us that we are all dependent upon one another to be the church that God wants us to be.

We're totally interconnected. You know the saying that no man is an island and it's certainly true in the church. Everyone has something unique to bring.

Read with me from verse 6 to 8. We have different gifts according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving let him serve.

[19 : 23] If it is teaching let him teach. If it is encouraging let him encourage. If it is contributing to the needs of others let him give generously. If it is leadership let him govern diligently.

If it is showing mercy let him do it cheerfully. In the church there are no spectators.

There's no watchers. There's no consumers. We rely on everyone else and everyone else relies upon us. Here's a question for the kids.

So on a ship on a cruise there's two types of people. Can you tell me what they are? On a cruise ship. Passengers and crew.

Who said that? Well done. I was looking at the kids and it came from over there but thank you very much. Passengers and crew. Is that what the church is like?

[20 : 24] The church doesn't have any passengers does it? The church is all crew. We're all serving. We're all looking out for one another's needs.

No one's there just to enjoy the trip. We're all hard at work serving the Lord seeking his glory in our generation. In a very real sense we belong to one another.

We depend upon one another. And to move forward as a church we all need to move forward. That's what it means to belong to a church.

And I just encourage you perhaps you're here tonight and I don't obviously I know lots of faces but I don't know everybody by any means. And I just want to encourage you if you belong to the Lord Jesus if you've trusted in him if you are walking in his way then become a member of the church.

Commit yourself to a church. And if you're just visiting tonight well just visit and enjoy and if you're on holiday or something perhaps think about home life and whether you're committed to your church at home or there's a church near you that you can or perhaps you've been coming for a while to Whitby.

[21 : 32] You live here and you've been coming for a while and the scriptures would teach us that as we come to know Christ ourselves then immediately it brings us into a relationship with others and there's an expectation that we would commit to one another to serve together to accept the church's discipline to accept the responsibility that we have to love and to serve and encourage and to rebuke one another.

So I'd encourage you if you're in that position to make that step ask about it if it's something you're not sure about what does it mean to be a member of the church then ask the elders here what that means and what you would need to do to become a member of the church.

If you don't do that you'll be worse off but so will the church. If you're a born again believer in the Lord Jesus then you should be committed to a local church so belonging is the first thing I wanted to speak about.

Secondly I want to speak about devotion that we should be devoted to one another. Chapter 12 and verse 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love honour one another above yourselves.

Now this verse is particularly isn't it about family shaped love. love. In the Greek those that know about this tell me that there's two words here about love.

[23 : 03] The word that's translated devoted is a family love philostorgoi and then there's a brotherly love you'll have heard it's like a cheese called Philadelphia that's a brotherly love.

So it's about family love and brotherly love. Be devoted to one another in love honour one another above yourselves. And of course we know that love one for another is the mark perhaps the mark of the church to those outside.

Jesus said didn't he by this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. And specifically here in Romans Paul is speaking about that familial love the Christian family love.

And think for a moment about a family and I know our families are in all sorts of states but think about an ideal family what a family should be. How should that sort of love show itself in the church?

Just well look down below. Verse 9 brotherly love should be sincere. There's no space for pretending.

[24 : 29] It wouldn't last very long anyway would it? It's hard work loving people. God brings all sorts together people that would never perhaps mix in any other situation in life but he brings us all from every sort of part of life rich and poor from those who are old and young from those from all sorts of experiences come together in the church and that's what's so wonderful about it is that there is a sincere love between these people who are so different and yet have something so wonderful in common.

But it should be sincere a sincere love. There's no pretending. Verse 9 says that the brotherly love should be deeply rooted in what is good. Clinging to what is good and turning away from what is evil.

We're committed as God's people to do that which is good and right and pleasing to God and not the things that we would or are regarded as evil that God says are wrong. We're committed verse 10 that brotherly love should not be selfish.

We should honor others above ourselves. Now there's a challenge that goes against our human nature that we would put other people before us that we would want them to be honored.

we would want to serve other people and yes that includes the ones that you find difficult to get along with. It includes the ones that you find annoying even to honor others above yourself.

[26 : 00] Verses 11 and 12 say never be lacking in zeal but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

brotherly love in the way that God would want us to love one another is not easy to weaken. It's a strong love, it's full of zeal and fervor, it wants to serve, it's joyful, it's patient, it's constant in prayer.

We don't give up easily, we don't walk away, we stick at it, that God gives us the energy that we need and no doubt the things you're thinking of.

Perhaps you're right in those but the Lord helps us to see it through, to keep serving, to keep loving even when we're challenged to pursue, challenged to be faithful, challenged to be patient, challenged to be constant.

The Lord gives us all that we need to show that sort of brotherly love to one another. That brotherly love in verse 13 is generous. It says sharing with God's people who are in need and practicing hospitality.

[27 : 19] I want to encourage you to do that. I don't know how that goes on in your church but I would encourage you to be those who share with those in need and particularly to be those who are hospitable to one another.

Opening your homes, sharing a meal together, loving one another in practical ways, that you spend time together, not just at church meetings, it's wonderful to meet together and worship and pray together and study together but what about spending time together just as God's people, just enjoying fellowship.

Perhaps invite someone along who's not a Christian that they might see something of your love and witness it. Brotherly love blesses, verse 14, bless those who persecute you.

Even when people take a stand against us, we're able by God's power to love and not to retaliate. we're able to bless.

The word there, persecute, is like someone chasing us down, someone like a hunter seeking for us. And the Lord says, even in that situation, even in that situation, love and bless.

[28 : 30] And verse 15, brotherly love cares what other people are feeling. Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. I don't know what's cheering you up today or what's making you sad, but we should know about one another.

What is making that family, that person, happy or sad at the moment? And rejoice with those who are rejoicing. When their sons won the bake-off, rejoice. Rejoice! when someone's weeping because they can't bear the suffering any longer.

Or when their husbands walked out on them. Weep with those who weep. Have empathy. This is a love which continues despite disagreements.

love. Now I can't imagine that that ever happens in your church, but there are times, aren't there, when Christians disagree. There are times when we perhaps don't see quite eye to eye about the way forward or there's some particular question in the church and it's difficult when people don't always agree and no doubt with whatever it was, there 50 of us, I don't know more than that, there's probably 50 different opinions about almost everything.

But the love that we're called to show one another is like the love that's in an ideal family, a perfect family, the families stick together, even when they disagree, even when there's problems, the family are tight and so should the church be.

[30 : 00] Be devoted to one another, the scriptures say, by fulfilling these challenging verses. They deserve more time just to spend thinking about those verses and what it means in our church situation.

So belonging, devotion and finally harmony. Romans chapter 12 and verses 16 to 21. Verse 16 says, live in harmony with one another.

Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Living in harmony, being of the same mind.

seeking to be united in thought and action. And I think very practically, Paul as he writes, deals with two things, highlights two things that we need to sort out if we are to learn to live and work in unity.

The first thing, from the second part of verse 16, is we need to kill pride. pride is at the root of every sin.

[31 : 16] And pride needs to be killed. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud. But be willing to associate with people of low position.

Or if you, I think the footnote in the NIV says, or willing to do menial work. Do not be conceited. pride. Whenever we begin to feel superior to other people, whenever we think that we have got the only way forward and no one else knows what's right, pride is creeping in and it will destroy the harmony of the church.

Look at every church split, every disagreement between Christians, and I suspect you'll find pride somewhere at the root of it.

We need to kill pride in ourselves, that we would be willing to do anything and serve anyone for the kingdom of God. There's no room for pride in the heart of the Christian as we seek to serve God together in the church.

And second thing is, so that's killing pride, and the second thing is we need to break the cycle of evil. And that's what he goes through in these next few verses. Look at verse 17 through to 21, in particular verses, well it's all of those verses, 17 to 21.

[32 : 40] 17a, do not repay anyone evil for evil. We know that, don't we? We know we shouldn't do that, we shouldn't fight back, but it's very tempting.

And even if we don't do it directly, we might find an opportunity just to tell somebody else what we think about what someone did. Don't repay evil with evil.

17b, do what is right in the eyes of everyone. Listening, hearing what people are saying, learning to work and move together as a community, doing what we know is right between us.

Verse 18, here's a key, here's a verse to remember, here's a verse to stamp on your memory that it would never disappear.

If it's possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. What a lovely motto to have in church life.

[33 : 50] If it's possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. This is true in our relationships in the church, and it's true in our relationships elsewhere.

If it's possible, so therefore sometimes it's impossible. Some of you will know that. You'll have relationships that are completely, you're unable to live at peace because the other person will not live at peace.

As far as it depends upon you, so that you can't do anything about what the other person has to do, but you have to think about what you can do. As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

And I just want to say, and it's helpful not knowing anything about what's going on in the church and not knowing any of you, if there's a situation like that in the church or in your relationships at home, if there's some relationship that's difficult, you need to hear this from the Lord.

Lord, if it's possible, as far as it depends upon you, live at peace with that person. Do everything you can to put that relationship right.

[34 : 59] In a moment, we're going to share in the bread and the wine, and we gather as the Lord's people around his table. And the scripture does say, doesn't it, we should examine ourselves as we come, and I think one of the things we should do is test ourselves, is there a relationship somewhere in the church that actually I need to sort out even before I share in this meal?

There's precedence isn't there in Matthew chapter 5, 23 and 24, where it talks about coming to bring an offering in the temple, and if when you're there you realise that someone has got something against you, then the right thing to do is just to put the gift down and go and sort it out, and then come and share together.

So even tonight, if that means that you need to go and make a phone call, or I'm sorry if I'm spoiling, but I think it's right, this is what scripture says, it's serious. Certainly don't take communion if you feel that there's something that needs sorting out first, and it might be that you need to talk to someone here and go out the back and have a chat, but make it a priority to live at peace with everyone.

if we're to be united, if we're to live in harmony as God's people, we need to commit ourselves to obey that command. How many relationships and how many churches would be healed if we took that seriously, that command?

Verse 19 and 20 says, do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, it is mine to avenge and I will repay, says the Lord.

[36 : 43] Leave revenge to God. In fact, it seems to suggest, or it does suggest, that we should heap up coals on someone's head, because it says underneath, 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. Be kind, be gracious, be generous, even to those who are being harmful or hurting you, and overcome at the end.

Evil with good. So, there's three things. This is what it means. We love the beginning of Romans, we love, some of us, theologically thinking, would love to grapple with all those ins and outs and all the debates about the theology.

We've got all this great description of what it means to become a Christian, to see our sin, to see the Lord Jesus, to realize that God has sent him to be our rescuer and our saviour.

And as he's done that, he's brought us into his kingdom. If we've placed our faith and trust in him, he's brought us together in God's people. And it's interesting, isn't it, the first thing Paul does is he turns the page, as it were, and says, right, now let's think about application.

[37 : 55] The first thing he does is to speak about our relationships with one another. Belong to one another. Have that sense of the importance that you are to each other.

Be devoted to one another. Commit yourself to one another with all the energy that you can muster. And then learn to live in harmony, despite the challenges that no doubt will come.

Thank you. Thank you.