

Ryan Graetz

Romans / Sanctification; Community; Service / Romans 12:1–8

Series Number: 23

Readings:

- Psalm 51
- Mark 12:28-34; 38-44
- Romans 12:1-8

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# Introduction

## Introduction Proper

Our society is becoming more and more connected, yet 2 in 5 Australians *feel* disconnected from society. Our earth holds more people than ever, yet a quarter of Australians feel lonely. That's according to statistics from the Ending Loneliness Together State of the Nation 2026 Report.

For all our progress and all our technology, it seems we aren't doing as well as we'd like at creating real, loving community.

But this should come as no surprise. After all, don't we as a society teach our kids, "follow your heart", "love yourself", "put yourself first", and "you don't have to change for anyone"?

Now, of course, there are some good elements to those ideas. The Bible says, "love your neighbour as yourself" - that means loving ourselves is part of the equation, right? And, by "follow your heart", we often mean that we should do what we enjoy doing - and surely, that's true!

But unfortunately, there's also a strong element of self-centred pride in each of those sayings. They make "me" the focus, the standard by which all else is measured. They make *my* satisfaction and pleasure the ultimate goal of my life. And if *everyone* thinks that way, we end up with...well, exactly what we're getting. A deeply arrogant, individualistic, and lonely society.

But there is a more effective way to live and create real, loving communities - the way of the Gospel. The word “Gospel” means good news. And the “Gospel” I’m talking about is the good news about who Jesus is and what he’s done for us.

I want to show you this morning that the Gospel empowers us to create true community. The Gospel empowers us to create true community.

## Review

So we’ve been studying the letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in the city of Rome; we call this letter *Romans*. And today we’re up to chapter 12.

The first word in [Romans 12](#) is the word “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy...”. And whenever we come across the word “therefore”, we should ask, “what is the therefore there for?” It points you back to what’s just been said, right?

In fact, Paul is referring to pretty much everything he’s written in Romans so far! And he gives us a short summary in 11:32: God has given all people over to disobedience. Why? So he can have mercy on everyone. That displays *God’s* character to the world - he is a God of justice AND a God of mercy. And he shows us his mercy through what Jesus did to reconcile us to God - that’s the Gospel.

Then we come to today’s passage, in chapter 12, where he says in: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy...”

For the first 11 chapters he’s been *explaining* God’s mercy in the Gospel. But now, in chapters 12-15, Paul is going to show us how we should *respond* to the Gospel. He’s going to give us lots of instructions!

Note the order here. We often get this backwards. We tend to think, “I need to follow all these rules and instructions make God happy with me, then he’ll let me into heaven.” But says the opposite! He’s saying “*God has shown all this amazing mercy on you* - without you doing anything to earn it! In light of that, here’s how we should respond.

We don’t obey God to be saved. Rather, we obey *because* God has saved us!

And what is Paul instructing us to do in [Romans 12:1-8](#)?

## Offer our bodies (v1)

### State the Point

Well firstly, he says we should offer our bodies to God. God's mercy in the Gospel drives us to offer our bodies to him.

## Show from the Bible/Explain

Do you see that in v1? We offer our bodies to God as a "living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God."

See, before Jesus came, people would offer animal sacrifices to God.

If you had sinned against God by breaking one of his laws, you would slaughter a bull or a lamb and offer it to God for your forgiveness. If you wanted to celebrate your relationship with God, you could offer a fellowship, or peace offering. You could also offer burnt offerings and other kinds too.

Now earlier in Romans, Paul shows us that when Jesus came, the system of sacrifices changed! *Jesus'* death became the sacrifice above all sacrifices. He offered himself on the cross as a sin offering to forgive all our rebellion against God. He turns God's anger away from us and washes us clean from every stain of sin.

And Jesus is also the *fellowship* offering that joins us in relationship with God.

You see this is the first and most important element of community, the element this world misses. To have true community with each other, our relationship with *God* needs to be restored. That's what Jesus did - that's God's mercy on us.

So why is Paul saying we should offer our bodies as another sacrifice?

Well back in [Romans 1](#), Paul described how we humans rebel against God, and that has terrible consequences for what we do with our bodies. He writes,

### **Romans 1:22–24 NIV**

<sup>22</sup> Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. <sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

And we still see that today, 2000 years after Paul wrote! Humans worship idols, money, careers, and our own image, and ignore the God who created them. We degrade and defile their bodies with all sorts of awful sexual behaviour against God's laws.

But when God created humans, he designed our bodies as *his* own image! And that means *he* can decide what we do should or shouldn't with them.

See, our bodies are not ours by right; we are only offering back to God what is God's own creation. So Paul is saying, "now that you've been forgiven by the mercies of God, don't offer your bodies to depravity again. Rather, offer your bodies in service to God!" (Seifrid [2007] 2011, 679-680)

## Illustrate

When I was young, my brothers and I used to play Lego. A lot.

We were very creative; we'd construct buildings, manufacture aircraft, and copy plotlines and spaceships we'd seen in movies and books.

But sometimes, our play would get...violent. We loved to build armies. Tanks, fighter planes, advanced space weaponry. We would get really into it, and our play would slowly descend into a dark pit of chaos and conflict. One time, my parents even walked in our room to find our Lego people being crucified everywhere!

And so sometimes my Dad would step in and teach us to play in a more peaceful, creative way again, you know, the way Lego was *designed* to be played with.

## Apply

Just like my Lego was designed for peaceful, positive use, our bodies were designed *by* God to be used *for* God. So what we do with our bodies *matters*. And not just on Sundays!

Do we use our bodies for sexual immorality? Theft? Road rage? Abuse? Gossip? as slaves of greed? God gave them to us to be used for much higher purposes than that.

And actually, we have a great opportunity here - because of Christ's sacrifice for us, our bodies are cleansed, made holy to offer holy worship that truly *pleases God*! And we're going to look at how to do that shortly.

## Transform our minds (v2-3)

### State the Point

But for now, we're going to move from our bodies to our minds. The Gospel drives us to transform our minds.

### Show from the Bible/Explain

In [Romans 12:2](#), Paul says “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Now Paul isn’t talking about the physical world here. He’s talking about the arrogant, self-centred patterns of thinking, the ideas, beliefs, and philosophies that humans set up in our rebellion against God. Back in [Romans 1:28](#), Paul writes:

**Romans 1:28 NIV**

<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

The world promotes ideas like “its my body, I can do whatever I like with it”, or “I’ve gotta look out for myself first, because no-one else will!”

Its easy to get stuck in the rut of thinking the way the world does; we were raised in it, and we live in it every day.

But if we stay there, we’re gonna be constantly fighting God in our minds, confused, conflicted, and eventually disobedient. These ideas get in the way of true community, don’t they? They put ourselves ahead of God and each other.

So what do we do instead?

Well Paul says we need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Our mindset, our attitudes, our thinking need to be renewed to be more God-centred and others-focussed.

And what will that do? Well that’s going to help us “test and approve what God’s will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Its going to help us work out the good, pleasing, and perfect things God wants so we can do them!

## Illustrate

My wife Verity and I have been married nearly 10 years now.

And we noticed after a while that we were transforming each others’ minds...I know that sounds creepy, but hear me out.

Verity’s a very pragmatic, practical person, but I tend to think more in theories, principles.

Which means I take ages to buy anything; I’m looking at the design, trying to get the best value for money, studying reviews, stressing about how to dispose of it. And she’s like, “Ryan, just hurry up and pick some paper towels!”

But after being married a while, I get her voice in my head, right? I've got a little Verity in there all the time, and she helps me think a bit more pragmatically.

And now whenever I go out, I tend to know what she would think if she were there. I just know what she'd want, how she'd respond.

## Apply

It's kind of like that with God too. When we let him transform us by renewing our minds, we don't have to hear him speaking to us in a loud voice from heaven giving us instructions for the day - no, we start *thinking* more like him. Get better at knowing what he'd want us to do in the situations we face.

And in v3, Paul says, "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."

You see, this world trains me to elevate myself and make myself the hero of every story. Those mindsets prevent me from living selflessly, sacrificially, in true community with others.

Instead, Paul is urging us to think realistically, humbly, accurately. To step outside ourselves and think about the bigger picture.

But how do we renew our minds like this?

Well we need God's *Holy Spirit* to supernaturally renew our minds - we can't do it on our own. But what we can do is put ourselves in the right places for him to do that work.

One place to be is in the Bible. The Bible reveals God to us; it teaches us how to think the way Jesus thinks. So place yourself in the Bible every day.

Another place to be is in church. God uses his people to sharpen our thinking. You need good teaching and encouragement from other believers, and you can practice living in true community!

Another place to have your mind renewed is in prayer. You get to know God relationally. You'll see which prayers he answers and which prayers he doesn't, and you'll start to understand why - that aligns your thinking to his will. (Timothy Szabo).

## Serve Christ's body (v4-8)

### State the Point

My third point today is that the Gospel drives us to serve Christ's body, the church. The Gospel drives us to serve Christ's body.

## Show from the Bible/Explain

In [Romans 12:4-5](#), Paul says “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.”

That word “members” literally means “body parts”. So just like your body is one whole “thing”, but its got lots of different parts that do different things - your hands grab, your eyes see, your legs walk, your appendix...appendixes?

Well the church is the same! The church is God's people, not a building. And when we believe in Jesus, he joins us all together. We're all interconnected, we're part of each other.

Then he says, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us...”

So the Holy Spirit gives each of us different spiritual gifts that we can use. Just like your mouth tastes, and your lungs breathe - its just like that in the church, too. The Holy Spirit equips us all with different gifts.

Why?

Well, so that we can *serve* each other in love and experience a true community of love. God is love. Christ is *full* of love. So of course you'd expect that his own body, the church, would demonstrate that love. Jesus the king who didn't come to be served by us, but to serve us by teaching us and giving up his own life.

Do you see it? God's love in the Gospel drives us to offer our bodies to God, to have our minds renewed by God, *so that* we become people who serve others - the way *Jesus* did. And that creates true community.

## Apply

And in v6-8 Paul lists a bunch of different gifts God's Spirit gives us:

- If you're given the gift of prophesy, prophesy as much as your faith allows! But don't be arrogant and go beyond that, right?
- If you're great at serving, then *use* that gift for serving - don't ignore it to do all the other ones. Same thing with teaching and encouraging.

- In the last three, Paul starts talking about using our gifts *well*. If your gift is that you love to share, then give *generously*. If you're a natural leader, don't just rely on charisma and charm - work *hard* at it.
- The last one is probably talking about *acts* of mercy - such as healing the sick and caring for the disabled.

Now if we think of ourselves too highly, we might think *our* gifts matter more than someone else's. We'll be constantly comparing ourselves with others and their gifts. Its all about *me*. That gets in the way of this vision of true community.

Thankfully, I've seen really good attitudes here at St. George's, and I've been really encouraged by you all. We have lots of very hard-working people who pour themselves and their gifts out for the rest of the church.

But here's where we do struggle: I fear some of us only come to church when we feel like it. And we're mainly thinking about what *we* can get out of it.

But notice that Paul calls us a *body*. In a body, all the parts rely on each other. The eye can't take a day off from seeing when it wants, and the brain has to keep regulating our body heat - the rest of the body needs them to function!

It the same with church. Its not about what I get out of it, and its not a golf club where I turn up whenever it suits me. No, we're here to *serve each other*. That means for most people, we should see you here pretty much *every week*. God gave you your gifts for *everyone's* benefit, and we need you to use them!

Now if you'd like to get more involved in serving, or if you want help exploring what your gifts might be, please have a chat to Mike or Tamra - they'd love to help you with that.

And speaking of using our gifts, let me encourage our single members this morning. Paul says in [1 Corinthians 7](#) that singleness is a great thing. It lets you really focus, undistracted, on using your gifts to serve Christ's body. If you can, make use of that!

But we also need to realise that doesn't make it easy to be single. So all of us as a church need to care for our single brothers and sisters! We have a responsibility to embrace them as our family and be a real community for them and actively include them in whatever ways we can.

## Conclusion

And so what answer does Christianity offer to the disconnection and loneliness of our society today?

Well in the Gospel, we see God in his mercy reach out to us. King Jesus left his glory and comfort behind in heaven and came to serve us by dying to save us from the judgment we deserved. And in his death and his resurrection, he reconciles us to God. Reconciliation with God is always the first step to true community.

And that Gospel creates in us a response of love. Instead of using our bodies for evil, the Gospel teaches us to offer them in service to God as living sacrifices.

Secondly, we let him transform us by renewing our minds. He rescues us from the self-centred, arrogant ways of thinking we see in the world.

And when God has our bodies and he's renewing our minds, we're ready to start serving others. God gives us gifts to use for the benefit of his church. And together, we become a true, loving community.

So do you see it? The Gospel, the good news about Jesus, empowers us to create *true* community, not the counterfeits this world offers. So let's offer our bodies, have our minds renewed, and serve one another like Jesus has served us.

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