How Should We Respond to God's Mercies?
Series: Righteousness Revealed
Romans 12:1-8
Chadron Bible Church

If you really believe the teaching discussed in Romans 1-11—that we are all sinners worthy of God's wrath and condemnation, but as believers in Jesus Christ have been made righteous children of God by faith through God's mercies—it's going to change the way you live. And it's going to change the what you live for. It's going to change the way we think about God, ourselves, and our world. And because it changes the way we think, it changes the way we behave. What you believe determines how you behave. The Gospel not only saves us, it transforms us. That's what we want to talk about this morning as we begin to discuss our response to all of the wonderful mercies of God in Christ that we have covered in Romans 1-11. It's at this point in the book of Romans that we move from all the heavy, theological doctrines of Romans 1-11 to the practical teachings of Romans 12-16.

1 Therefore [in light of everything said previously] 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. 2 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.

So Paul **urges** us, based upon the **mercies** of God [**plural** mercies; all of the wonderful truths about who we are in Christ revealed in the previous eleven chapters], in light of all that He's done for us, to **present** ourselves as living sacrifices to God. In other words, to **dedicate** our lives to God and His will.

In view of God's mercies, we should <u>dedicate</u> our lives to God and His will.

The idea of presenting a sacrifice would have reminded the original audience of the sacrifices made under the OT Law or even of the pagan religions where individuals, in an act of worship, would present an animal of some kind as a sacrifice on an alter. In offering the sacrifice, you were securing the mercies of the gods you were worshipping. So Paul uses that concept to typify our response to the gospel. More important than animal sacrifices is our sacrifice of living for God. As I meditated on this, I couldn't help but note some **differences and highlights**.

1. **Our sacrifice is in <u>response</u> to God's mercies, not for His mercies.**
   Normally, people offered sacrifices for mercy but with the Gospel, that's backwards. He has shown us mercy in Christ's sacrifice. Therefore we, are to give our lives in response. To turn that around would be to undermine the gospel in my opinion. It would put the work for salvation back on us instead of on what Christ did for us.

2. **The sacrifices are <u>living</u>, not dead.**
   In the ancient religions, you would offer something, and it would die. But because Christ died for us, once and for all, we can now live for God. We can be free to serve Him—free from Law & sin's power over us. The funny thing about living sacrifices though, is that they can crawl off of the altar. We have to make sure we keep ourselves on the altar. Keep giving our lives to God. Maybe we have a moment of dedication in our life—like many of you probably did at a Christian camp—but we have to maintain that dedication.

The first century readers would have also understood that:

3. **The sacrifices are <u>whole</u>, not partial.**
   Excuse the graphic imagery, but no one ever took one wing off a dove and sacrificed the wing or one leg off a lamb and sacrificed that leg and let the lamb go. It was all or nothing. And that's how our response to God should be. Not partially on the altar and partially off of it. We should live in such a way that we are all God's. In every part of our lives. He doesn't just want to be our co-pilot. He's our Pilot.

Voluntary dedication <u>pleases</u> God.

That's what **true and proper worship** is. **Acceptable**, **well pleasing** worship: **living our whole lives in an engaging response to God 7 days a week**. It **pleases** God when we voluntarily give ourselves in dedication to Him.

Urge

As I studied this, I realized that this is why Paul uses the word urge and not command. He didn't say I command you to dedicate your life to God. He said I urge you because it's **voluntary**. And urge is a word that is **making his appeal as strong as possible without commanding**.

Dedication is the only <u>logical</u> response to God's mercies.

If we really understand and believe what we studied in Romans 1-11 it's the only **logical** thing to do. The NASB, I don't think, captured this well. Some of your translations may say this is your **reasonable** or **intelligent** service of worship. That's because the Greek word there is from where we get our word logic. The only logical, intelligent response to God's mercies to us in Christ—**having carefully thought it through**—is to **give our lives to God**. To say, "God, I'm all Yours. Use my life for your glory." **Anything less is illogical**. Believers should **reach a point in their Christian lives** where they realize what God has done for them and say, "You know what? My life is yours God. Show me your will. I live for you."

Rerouting

We should have a rerouting moment. I don't know if it's still this way but back in the day I would set my GPS to a certain destination and if I missed the turn or exit it would kindly say, "Rerouting." As believers, we need to have a rerouting moment. We were going one way with the world. Following the ways of the world and doing the will of the world. Living for ourselves. And when we come to Christ, we should reach a point where there is a rerouting. It's time to live

for God. To let this truth about Christ **change** us. **Transform** us. **Renew** us. That's why He give us the Holy Spirit to give us the power to change.

Negatively, Don't be conformed to the world
I like J. B. Philip's translation of verse 2: **Do not be squeezed into the world's mold**. Break free from the world's mold. We are like playdough, always being formed by something. And the world wants to mold us into its shape for us. Paul says to resist that.

That's interesting to think about because many people, if not most people who resist God, want to be in charge of their own life. It's an illusion, really. You're not free. You're a slave to sin. You look just like the world. The freest people I know are people who know Jesus.

Positively, Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Let the truths of Romans 1-11 sink in and change you from the inside out. To see ourselves in light of God's Word and Romans 1-11. Aligning ourselves with His values instead of the world's.

I sent out a bunch of texts this week to random people, asking them, "How does the world try to squeeze you into its mold?" The responses I got were super helpful and thoughtful.

- The world says to isolate from people because they're hard.
  The Word says prioritize people because they matter.
- The world wants you to be cynical or despairing, esp. during election season.
  The Word says to dwell on what's good and right.
- The world says to be angry over your undesirable circumstances.
  The Word says to be content and thankful in every circumstance.
- The world says you have to work hard every day to provide.
  The Word says to take a day of rest and trust Him to provide.
- The world says to blend in because everyone else is doing it.
  The Word says to stand out from the crowd by following Jesus and clear Bible teaching.
- The world says to occupy yourselves with the here and now.
  The Word says to live intentionally for what matters forever.
- The world says you are what people think of you.
  The Word says you are what God thinks of you in Christ.
- The world says to go to people first for what you need.
  The Word says to seek first God and His kingdom.

Let me ask you, which one do you think is the wise choice? Which one will really help you live well? And which will drive you to anxiety, despair, and heartache. As we are transformed by the renewing of our minds to think differently in order to validate that God's way is better; God's way is good; God's way is the way of life; it's the way of joy; it's the way of hope.

One of the things that has always struck me about this familiar verse is that if we want clarity on God's will, we have to be committed.

Clarity comes with commitment. Direction comes with devotion.

I think a lot of Christians want it the other way around. Over the years I've talked to several individuals who want to know what God wants them to do with their lives, but they struggle to make it to church consistently or to get involved in church at all. It just seems like Jesus is only part of their lives and not the center of it and they wonder why they struggle. If you give your life to God without reservation, He'll honor that. He'll show you the way in His time.

With the rest of Romans 12-16, the rest of the Romans, we're going to **develop a powerful framework for living a life fully dedicated to God**. What does it look like to live a life fully dedicated to God? When someone understands the mercies of God?

A Framework for Faithful Living.

1. **Harbor humility in God's household. (Romans 12:3-8)**

3 For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Main Point: Humility
There's a lot to get lost in here, especially concerning the individual gifts. But the main point of the passage is that if we understand the mercies of God (this righteousness you cannot earn that's been given to you by a sovereign God; that we're products of grace) and you really dedicate your life to God, your life will be marked by **humility**. **You won't think more highly of yourself than you ought**.

The Gospel Humbles Us
The gospel humbles us. It takes humility to drop the religious pride and admit I can't be good enough to get to heaven and I need Jesus. To then say, I'm not going to live for myself but for God.

Sound Judgment
But sometimes when we hear that word humility we think that we are good for nothing or should think nothing of ourselves. Balance that thought of I'm a nobody with Paul's statement that we will **think of ourselves with sound judgment**. Remember, we're in Christ. Christ died for us. We're children of God indwelt by the Spirit. God chose us. We're overwhelming conquerors. We're magnificent in Christ. These are all wonderful mercies. God loves us so much.

He has also have a special place to serve in the body of Christ, the church, God's household. A life dedicated to God will become part of a Christian community. Sometimes people have the idea that "Well I'm just part of the universal church and I don't need the local church." The NT doesn't know anything like that mindset. It **assumes that if you're living God's will, you'll get involved in a church family** and **you'll operate in humility there**.

Humility is accentuated by human body metaphor
He says There are many members in one body and not all have the same function. Our bodies are made up of members: Eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands, feet, et cetera. Just has the body has very different parts that serve different functions, so too the church has very different people that God has put together and designed to serve the church in different ways.

At the moment of salvation, we are entrusted through the Spirit with certain abilities to make a difference in the body of Christ. These spiritual gifts, a subject for another time, are added to the already natural abilities and personalities and resources we have to the body. I had some thoughts about humility and our place in the body:

1. **I am what I am by God's <u>grace</u>.**
   There's a reason they're called gifts. We don't earn them. They are a privilege and not a merit. Power is from God to fulfill His will, not my own. Not my will. Not my power.
2. **I am only <u>part</u> of the body.**
   I am not the whole body. It's not about me. I'm part of it. I'm not even the head of the body Christ is. The Head tells the body what to do.
3. **I am <u>dependent</u> upon other parts of the body.**
   If they are not well, functioning in their God-intended roles, I am not well. We call that Handicapped. Incapacitated. The definition of incapacitated is, "deprived of strength or power; debilitated." So it's important that we exercise our roles in the body.
4. **I am to use my gifts to <u>benefit</u> the body.**
   God doesn't give us gifts so that we can look cool or somehow elevate ourselves. Paul, writing this from Corinth, was in a church where people had pride over the gifts that were more noticeable, especially gifts involving public speaking. But the point of the gifts is to edify, build up, the body. To benefit the whole.

Because we have so many people here who understand this, last week's mission conference was successful. It was awesome. It was a wonderful Sunday. I was blown away by how much different just a couple of people could make. I know they don't want their names mentioned but one couple, Tim & Connie, chaperoned our missionaries and helped transition us between the round table and the main service. That freed me up so much to focus on what I need to focus on, and the missionaries were better cared for. Or Kimberly, she volunteered to teach k-2 during the round table, and she came up with all those fun questions throughout the morning for our luncheon afterwards where we handed out prizes. Or how about the missions team communicating with all the missionaries? The people who said, "I'll bring a dish or two." The members of the music team who were flexible when a couple people called in sick. The people who vacuumed and washed dishes. It couldn't happen without the whole body.

The best churches I know of and have been a part of are the ones where the body is functioning at full capacity as possible. Everyone is exercising the gifts given them. They see themselves as contributors and not just consumers. They are stewarding the talents they've been given.

One of the fun exercises we've done as leadership is to write down everyone's names and what they contribute to the body. Unless you're new or still seeking, just about everyone here is serving in some capacity—it's just amazing. That's what makes the church a special place. I would encourage you to keep asking God, **"God what is my calling in this season of life? What am I good at? What am I passionate about? How do you want to use my life? And just be faithful where you're at. Even if you consider it lesser things.**

I was talking to another pastor this week and he said that before they get out of the car in the parking lot, they have a moment where they remind the kids that they didn't come just to be ministered to… of course we want to worship and hear from God, but we also want to minister to others. How can we be a blessing today? Not just a consumer, but a producer for God's kingdom.

Conclusion: So let's come to communion this morning with thoughts of dedication. Is God part of your life? Or is He your life? The center of your life? Are you giving Him Sunday or every day? Does He really have your heart? If you really understand who Jesus is and what He has done for you, it's going to change how you live and what you live for. You're going to dedicate your life to Him.

I urge you:

1. **<u>Dedicate</u> your life to God today**: At some point you've got to get to the point where you say, "God, here I am. Use me." If Romans 1-11 is true, this is the only wise, intelligent thing to do. To live for God and the things that matter most.

2. **<u>Re-dedicate</u> your life to God**: As I mentioned, we are living sacrifices and we tend to crawl off the altar. Maybe God is saying to you this morning, it's time to crawl back up on it.

Different Measures of Faith

Each of us has been granted a measure of faith that we are to exercise in accordance with our giftings. So it's not about mustering up faith but about responding to God's mercies actively by serving God in faith. And everyone's a little different. I like to think that some have a small cup of faith. Some have a large cup of faith. Some have a gallon. Some have a teacup.

How D. L. Moody Grew Faith

But I've also never forgotten some of the words of D. L. Moody. He once said that he prayed over and over again for God to give him faith. I don't think there's anything wrong with that but he said, "I realized that my faith began to grow as I read God's Word." If you want your faith to

grow, you should be getting into God's Word consistently. If you want your mind renewed, you've got to get into God's Word. But this faith is carried out through the exercise of our gifts.

If you don't know what that is for you, just ask yourself, **"What is your calling in this season of your life? What are you good at? What are you passionate about?"**