

Psalm 133**A song of ascents. Of David.**

¹ How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!

² It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.

³ It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

Romans 12:1-21**A Living Sacrifice**

12 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. ² 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.

Humble Service in the Body of Christ

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. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ 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; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, 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 in Action

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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."

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Sermon: "In View of God's Mercy"

Please turn your Bible to **Romans chapter 12** – we're looking at the **whole chapter**

We'll briefly look at **Psalms 133**.

There is an outline if you would like to take down some notes!

Let me **pray** first...

Intro

The Apostle Paul begins verse 1 of chapter 12 **urging His brothers and sisters in Christ in Rome and us here in Toukley** - *"in view of God's mercy, to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God"*

What is “God’s mercy” that Paul is talking about?

Well – it’s basically the **first 11 chapters of Romans** – where Paul has been **unfolding God’s mercy before our eyes!**

Paul has told us in no uncertain terms **all people are sinners deserving God’s wrath and punishment** – but **God has shown mercy and grace** and sent Jesus to **take the punishment for sin by dying on a cross** – and **offers a way for people to be forgiven of sins** – and **have eternal life in Heaven.**

Paul has told us – people can’t get this mercy through their own efforts **but only through faith in Jesus.**

[Slide-Cross]

God’s mercy is simply – Jesus on the Cross!

So, Paul now says in chapter 12 - In view of this “***mercy shown by Jesus on the Cross***” — a Christian should be motivated to **a life of thanksgiving to God and His Son Jesus** – **because we were destined for Hell** - but in God’s **mercy** - found in Jesus - **we are now destined for Heaven**; something we should be **forever grateful** for!

Paul then says in the rest of chapter 12 – our lives are **all about relationships**

[Slide-Points]

- 1st – Our relationship **with God** (vv1-2)
- 2nd – Our relationship **with ourself** (vv3-8)
- 3rd – Our relationship **with each other** (vv9-16)

- And 4th – Our relationship **with people who are not so nice** (vv17-21)

Our relationship with God looks like (vv1-2)

[Slide-relationship with God]

1st then – What should our relationship **with God** look like – that's vv1-2

Paul says in verse 1 we are to give ***our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – that's what true and proper worship*** is

So, what does “***offering our bodies as a living sacrifice***” mean?

I came across this story which might help: *In a church service one Sunday, the collection/offering plate came to a little girl sitting at the end of a row. She took the plate, put it down on the floor, and stood in it. The person taking up the collection asked her what she was doing, she responded: “In Sunday School, I learned that I was supposed to **give myself to God**”*

That's what Paul means by “***offering our bodies as a living sacrifice***” – **giving our whole being to God**

So...

- Our **eyes** will see and read God's Word. Our **eyes** will see the need around us – our **eyes** will see **those lost from God** – and our **eyes** will look humbly and patiently towards God
- Our **ears** will **listen to the quiet gentle voice of God** through the Holy Spirit. Our **ears** will **listen to God's Word preached**. Our **ears** will **listen to the cries of those in distress**

- Our **tongues** will speak God's truth; confess our sins, encourage others; correct others; pray for others and ourselves; and proclaim the Good News of Jesus
- Our **hands** will lift up those who have fallen – our **hands** will perform tasks of service, like cooking, cleaning, typing, mending, administration. Our **hands** will be **prayerful hands**!
- Our **arms** will embrace the lonely and the unloved.
- Our **feet** will walk in God's paths/ways. Our **feet** will be like **those beautiful feet that bring the Good News of Jesus** (Romans 10:15)

The **challenge** for us this morning: is simply – **are we offering our eyes, ears, tongues, hands, arms and feet to God?**

(pause)

Sacrifice by definition means we **need to give something of our bodies to God**

Give of our **time**

Give of our **talents**

Give of our **wealth/possessions**

(pause)

Paul also tells us in verse 2 – “***not to conform to the pattern of this world***”

The pattern of our world today – in Australia – is that 80% of the population think they have better things to do than **worship God**, better things to do than **give God the glory for what they have in their life** and better things to do than **follow Jesus**

and worship Him at Church on Sunday! But just because the majority do the wrong thing – doesn't make it right.

The pattern of our world today - is that our high-school children are tempted by their peers - **to be “cool”** – and try **vaping** or **alcohol** or **marijuana** or **other drugs** or **pornography** or to **have casual sex** or **sleep around**.

You see the problem is – as sinful human beings – **we can be deceived into pleasing other human beings – rather than pleasing God!**

Paul is telling us not to follow the pattern of this world because it leads to missing out on Heaven!

(pause)

The way to avoid falling for the pattern of this world – Paul says in the rest of verse 2 is “***be transformed by the renewing of your mind***”

How come when a song from the 1970s comes on the radio – and I can remember just about every lyric? And how come I can remember so many jokes? But I can't remember so many bible verses?

Well – it's because **I spent so much time back then – listening to music – and telling and retelling dumb jokes – that I trained the neural networks in my brain to remember this stuff!** And it's **all worldly and not useful stuff!**

Knowing songs from 1970s and telling jokes is not going to help someone who doesn't know Jesus or help someone who's got cancer or someone who has lost a loved one and needs pastoral care?

My brain needs to be transformed – and my mind renewed.

Why?

The rest of verse 2 tell us why - *then I will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

In other words - then I'll be able to **do what God wants and to please God!**

What Paul is saying is the **two systems** – **this World** and **God's will** – are **totally incompatible**. Whether we are thinking about the purpose of life or the meaning of life, about how to measure greatness or how to respond to evil, or thinking about ambition, sex, honesty, money, community, religion or anything else, **the two sets of standards in these two systems are so completely divergent that there is no possibility of compromise!**

So how **do I renew my mind** – so it knows what God wants?

Answer: Read the Bible [*how much time am I spending?*]– I need to read the Bible - and with the help of the Holy Spirit – apply it to my life and other people's lives!]

Paul mentions the relationship with God first – because it's meant to be our first priority!

Our relationship with ourself looks like (vv3-8)

[Slide-Relationship with self]

2nd – What should our relationship **with ourself** look like – that's vv3-8

V3 – Paul says – *don't think too highly of yourself*

When I was growing up in **Manchester** if someone boasted about themselves too much – someone would say “*I’ll buy you a trumpet for Christmas – so you can blow your own trumpet*”

Paul’s telling us to be **humble** – **not** **show offs**

Instead, Paul says we are to see ourselves as **being part of a body** with many members – that body – we call the ***body of believers*** – or the ***body of Christ***

And God in His grace – has given each of us – as members of that body – **different gifts**

Paul lists these **gifts** in **general categories**

Prophecy (which includes preaching); **serving**; **teaching**; **encouraging**; **giving**; **leading** and **showing mercy**.

We’ve **seen these gifts in action this morning** – a person **leads** the service, a person **reads** the Bible, another person **prays**, a person **preaches**, we all **sing**, we all **encourage**, some people **teach** the children; we **give** through the collection and through food; and we **show mercy** to those who are unwell or struggling [*we’ve even shown mercy to Allowah*]

The gifts we have are **not** **so we feel ever so puffed up and proud** – **but** to **serve others** - to **benefit the whole body** – and to **bring glory to God**

Jesus set up the Church as the way **for us to love God together and love one another**.

We're not to complain – if someone has different gifts to us or if someone has more gifts than us – we are to use the gifts that God has given us diligently and faithfully!

(pause)

In our Bible Study questions this week – there was an **optional challenge**. You were invited to **complete a spiritual gifts/skills survey**.

It will give you **an inventory of the gifts** God has blessed you with.

You might want to **ask a family member or friend** what they think your gifts are.

You can **give me a copy** of you like.

But let me just challenge us to ask ourselves – ***“am I using the gift God has blessed me with, or have I left it on the shelf?”***

(pause)

Our relationship with each other looks like (vv9-16)

[Slide-Relationship with others]

3rd – What should our relationship with each other look like – that's vv9-16

What Paul describes in these verses is **true love**

V9 – true love is to be **sincere** – not hypocritical – not fake – not false.

V9– true love will **hate what is evil** (evil is the opposite of love) and cling to what is good!

V10–true love **shows devotion to one another** – and **considers others better than ourselves** (see Philippians 2:3b)

V11-true love will **demonstrate a zeal for God and the things of God** – we will **allow ourselves to be set on fire for Jesus - by the Holy Spirit**

V12-true love will **persevere even during trials** – because if we truly love God – we know **He allows trials to test our faith and to make us stronger**. So, as we face trials and tribulations; **we can be joyful knowing we have the certain hope of Heaven; we can be patient with affliction knowing God is in control.**

It's often in these tough times that **we grow spiritually!**

V13-true love sees we only have anything because **God gave it to us**; so, we should **share what we have with the Lord's people.**

We can also show love by **practicing hospitality** – providing **food for church; meals for those who are sick**; and also **inviting people to our home for lunch/dinner and fellowship.**

It's easy to love **those who are nice** and those who love us.

Paul extends our true love for others **who even persecute us** - in v14.

The loving thing to do for someone who is persecuting us, **is to pray that God will help them to change** – as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:44)

Then there are some people as in verse 15 **who are rejoicing**. Let's say they are rejoicing over a new job or a new house; we can show we love them by rejoicing with them over their blessing!

Others, still in verse 15 might be **mourning the death of a loved one**; **we can show we love them by consoling them and mourning with them**. **If they shed a tear, we may genuinely shed a tear too because we empathize with them in their grief!**

It's also showing true love if we genuinely desire to live in harmony with one another as Paul says in verse 16. **How much better would our world be, if everyone lived in harmony**. As Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder sang *"Ebony and Ivory live together in perfect harmony, side by side on my piano keyboard, oh Lord why don't we?"*

Following on from that, still in verse 16; we shouldn't think we are so great that we can't associate with people who might not be as wealthy as us - or have as good a job as us - or who are not as educated as us - or not as healthy as us. That's just **being proud and arrogant**. **Remember who Jesus hung out with: lepers, prostitutes; tax collectors, sinners and the outcasts of the society**.

By showing love to people that everyone else write-offs – we may win them to follow Jesus – because they feel loved and valued for the first time in their lives!

In summary, **our love should be other-person centred; not self-centred!**

(pause)

From verses 9 to 16 - is there an area of loving others that we need to work on – what action will we take?

(pause)

Think of someone who is in need or unloved or left out – what action will we take?
For example – what will we do if we see someone sitting on their own in church or at morning tea?

[Slide-Unity]

What Paul is describing in these verses is **a picture of unity in love**

The same picture our Old Testament reading from **Psalm 133** is describing

[Please turn briefly to Psalm 133]

King David - the writer of the Psalm 133 says in v1 – **how great it is when God's people live together in unity!**

He gives **two pictures** of this **unity**

1st picture in verse 2 – describes the **ordination of Aaron** as the first high priest of Israel – David says unity is like when Aaron was anointed and the whole assembly of **God's people rejoiced together on that great occasion!**

2nd picture in verse 3 – David visualizes the **dew of Mount Hermon** in the North of Israel which was renowned for watering vegetation in the dry season **makes its way south to Mount Zion in Jerusalem in the South**. It's a way of saying – how great it is when **north and south Israel are joined together in unity**

David finishes the Psalm by saying – when there's unity – *it's there that God bestows His blessing, even life forevermore!*

David and Paul's point is the same – **it's a great blessing when God's people are on the same page – Jesus' page!**

(pause)

Our relationship with people who are not so nice (vv17-21)

[Slide-not so nice people]

4th – What should our relationship with people who are not so nice look like – that's vv17-21

Paul says – v17 - the way we handle people that are not so nice to us is:

We don't retaliate and don't **repay evil for evil**

Also, we don't come up with some sort of scheme to get even!

We make sure – v18 – that - from our end – **we try to have peaceful relationships with everyone**

Paul says – v19 – let **God be the one to get angry about the other person's behaviour** – let **God punish them if need be**

Instead, amazingly in v20 - Paul says **we are to be kind to those people who are not nice** – we're to feed them and give them a drink – and in doing so Paul says – it's like “***we're heaping burning coals on their head***”

What Paul is teaching is that when we are kind to someone who has been “mean” or “nasty” to us – they may feel ashamed – because we're not retaliating or treating them the way they treated us – **instead we're showing the love of Jesus to them!**

“**Burning coals**” in the Bible **symbolizes both judgment** (Psalm 140:10) and spiritual purification or cleansing (Isaiah 6:6; Leviticus 16:12) – so as we treat an enemy with love – **God's judgment and purification get to work on them** – and **they are convicted of their behaviour and show remorse**

For example – **we might have a grumpy, negative, gossipy neighbour – who is not so nice to us – and when we find out they are sick – we give them a meal and say we'll pray for them. Our kindness causes our neighbour to reflect on the times they were mean to us and they change their behaviour!**

Paul's saying - **our kindness to people who are not so nice - may lead them to Christ!**

Perhaps **a challenge** for us then – to **think of someone who is not so nice to us – how can we show them the love of Jesus?**

(pause)

Conclusion (John 13:34-35)

To finish up then,

[Slide-John 13:34-35]

Why is Paul telling us **to offer our bodies as a sacrifice – and to not conform to the pattern of the world – and to be transformed by the renewal of our mind?**

The answer is in a **command** Jesus gave:

Jesus say in John 13:34-35

³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Paul's telling us all this – so that by loving others – people will know we are disciples of Jesus – like signposts to Jesus!

Our vision for our church is **to transform** [there's that word transform again] – **transform the community with the love** [there's that word love again] – **with the love of Jesus.**

If we show love to our community – **we may win them to Christ.**

That's the loving thing to do!

Let's pray...

Father God, thank you for your mercy in sending Jesus.

Thank you that Jesus loved us so much, He laid down His life for us.

Help us to respond this morning by loving others as you have loved us.

Help us to show the love of Jesus to our community, so more people follow Him.

In Jesus Name, we pray. Amen