

Introduction

- A wee while ago I was listening to the a radio programme:
 - programme going back through the history of the TV show "This is Your Life", picking up some of the great moments from the show, different people who had been on:
 - **Buster Keaton, Laurel & Hardy, Mohammed Ali, Nigel Mansell....**
- One of the things they picked out as significant was just how overwhelmed the person who was the subject of the show often was:
 - not just by being on TV - most of them were already celebrities...
 - but by the extravagant love of the people involved to go to all that bother to put the show on for them;
 - Mohammed Ali, when he was on, said "pretty much everything has happened to me; I didn't think I could be surprised any more; but I have been by everyone turning out for me!"
- Maybe you've experienced the same kind of thing on a more mundane level at a surprise birthday or wedding anniversary party:
 - the person who is the centre of attention feeling "can this really be meant for me?"
 - "you shouldn't have, I'm not worth all the bother..."
 - but at same time delighted, valued, loved!
- When have **you** ever been extravagantly loved?
- What has that got to do with Romans 12?
 - this passage, particularly the first two verses (**which is what we are going to be focusing on**), serves as a pivot, a turning point in Paul's letter to the Romans;
 - in that letter Paul first sums up what Christ has done for us, before moving on to the practical implications of living for Christ.
- He is answering the question, "**What is the Christian faith all about?**"
- And his answer is:
 - **since you are extravagantly loved, go and live for the one who loves you extravagantly!**
- I'm proposing that we look over the next few weeks at the closing chapters of Romans, at some of the practical implications our faith should have for the way we live.
 - Paul's thinking is rooted in the "**therefore...**" we find here
 - so as we think about using our gifts, about being consistent in our Christian lives, about relating as Christians to the secular authorities, about times when we as Christians disagree.... all is rooted in the difference the gospel has made for us

Exposition

- Lets look together at what Paul has to say in Romans 12, particularly vs 1 & 2:
(1) Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy,
- In verse one Paul urges his readers to make an offering - an offering of their bodies. We'll look carefully at the reasons he gives for making this offering, the nature of the offering, the character of the offering, and the purpose of the offering:
- I went to a Christian conference called **Spring Harvest** in 1992, just immediately before I went to selection school, exploring becoming a CofS minister:
 - main preacher was **Stuart Briscoe...** his catch phrase all week (he was preaching from Hebrews) was "**Therefore - what's it there for?**"
- The whole of Romans 1-11 has been about our sin, our desperate need, and how Jesus death and resurrection perfectly meet our need.
- It is a masterful exposition of the Christian gospel!
- Its a glorious and glowing exploration of how great our salvation is!
 - "peaking" in Romans 8: "**I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us**", or later, "**And we know that**

in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." or again, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

- and its in view of **this great mercy**, its because of all of that, that Paul says "**therefore**"; if all of that is true, then you need to respond.

- God's mercy is the reason for the offering of our bodies; **it is because of God's extravagant, flagrant love for us**, (shown most clearly in Jesus dying on the Cross, in his taking the punishment that should have been ours):
 - it is **"in view of God's mercy"** that we are urged to respond!

to offer your bodies as living sacrifices,

- This is the nature of the offering - as sacrifice!
 - a sacrifice is something completely given over to the deity;
 - in OT times it would be killed!
 - even today, if we sacrifice something we give up our rights to that thing
- Paul doesn't mean we are to go around performing human sacrifice!!
 - what it does mean is that our bodies, the things we do, the people we are - those are to be given over completely to God, offered to him as completely as a sacrifice...
- **There's silly story told about a pig and chicken walking down the road together; they pass a sign advertising a breakfast to benefit the poor; charity breakfast; the chicken says to the pig, "You and I should donate a bacon and egg breakfast!" The pig replied, "Not so fast; for you it would just be a contribution, but for me it would be a total commitment!!"**
 - Paul isn't mincing his words here - **he calls on us to make that total commitment, not simply to contribute some of our lives and hold the rest back for ourselves.**

holy and pleasing to God

- This is the character of the offering, holy and pleasing to God
 - not because of our worthiness;
 - not even because we give ourselves completely to him;
 - but because in dying for us, taking our sin on himself, Jesus has made us holy, Jesus has made us pleasing to God;
- So, when we offer ourselves to God its as if God sees what we would be like if we were like Jesus!
 - offer to God something that is really valuable - yourself!!
 - made so by Jesus!

- this is your spiritual act of worship.

- This is the purpose of the offering - worship
 - we don't do this just out of obligation, but to worship God;
 - to say with every fibre of our being, "you are great, you are worthy, you are absolutely the most important thing in my life, you are my number one"
- While we gather "for worship" on a Sunday morning and evening, that is really a stunted use of the word worship!
 - for true worship is a whole life thing;
 - if we came on a Sunday morning and said to God: "I worship you" but our lives the rest of the week didn't square with that confession, then our words would be empty of worship;
 - real worship happens when we seek to have God as number one, not just on a Sunday, but all week.

- **What will that offering mean? What will it look like, day to day?**

(2) Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,

- **Negative** - don't conform, be squeezed
- Christians will be different, distinctive

- Different from the pattern of this world:
 - not spelled out in this passage, but earlier in Romans we have a sense of what Paul meant by this phrase - godlessness and wickedness, in all its vast array; anything which does not put God first, anything that breaks his commandments (a codification of "God first!")

but be transformed

- **Positive** - be transformed, changed
- How many folk watch those room or garden transformation shows?
 - **Changing Rooms, Ground Force, scariest one is the one where the kids get to transform their own homes while their parents are away!!**
- I like the **speeded up** "transformation" sequences:
 - how it **was** moving through to how it **is**;
 - often amazing changes!
 - **intriguing to reflect that those rooms/gardens often have first to be stripped back before the new construction can be put in place;**
 - how old habits, ways of treating people, patterns of behaviour need to be broken, so we don't conform any longer, and replaced by Christ-like virtues...

by the renewing of your mind.

- How will that transformation be effected - starts with the mind renewed
 - **Scripture studied, explored, implemented!**
 - compare with plan or designer in those transformation shows!

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is

- One result of that transformation is discernment in choosing God's will; "approve" suggests agreement, "yes, I'm up for that!"

- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

- Reminder of the nature of God's will, good for us, pleasing, properly satisfying, perfect.
 - God doesn't have it in for us

Conclusion

- **(12:1)** Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.
- **(2)** Do not conform any longer 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.