

## ***THE CHURCH WITH MANY MINISTERS, ROMANS 12:1-8***

Pax Romana 28

◆**Intro:** Some years ago in an episode of the Lois and Clark show, by some freak accident Superman's powers become extracted out of him and displaced into the nearby Lois Lane. Well! At first she is quite enthralled with her new super-human self, leaping tall buildings, racing speeding bullets and the like. But her excitement settles as she begins to realize that with her super hearing she can hear a 474 going down off the coast of Britain. She leaps into action but then becomes aware of cries all the way in Fiji, screams of distress at the approach of a tsunami. As she juggles the decision, a voice from across town cries "mommy, mommy" as a little boy plunges through the ice... Super Lois wants to serve, she has the gifts, but although she has great powers she isn't God. She cannot be two places at once. We watch her anguish as she is crushed by a sense of guilt and surprisingly, inability. Lois is driven to the brink of sanity as the joy of serving is displaced by the sorrow of the undone.

◆Some folks share Lois's frustrations. They are the ones with servant hearts who want to share the love they have received from God. Others believe in only waiting to receive. Some folks see the church family as a place they get to contribute to God by contributing to others. Another view is that the church is a good place to go and see how much you can get out of it for yourself. Some church people jump to help out projects and needs because they know that if they don't, God's love won't get out the front door. Others think Christian compassion is the job of the church

## ***THE CHURCH WITH MANY MINISTERS, ROMANS 12:1-8***

Pax Romana 28

staff. I'd like to think with both these groups today. To those of you with servants hearts I say,

◆**1. We praise God for people who live their sacrifice.** Put it another way, thank God for the people who wear his skin. [A little boy was once shaking in fear from the noise of a storm. His mother said, "You don't have to be afraid. God will always take care of you." "That's great", he said as he crawled on her lap, "but right now I need someone with skin on."] Well, a Christian's calling is to put Christ's skin on.

◆**A.** Paul is picturing the Jewish sacrifices. In the Old Testament times, families would have to bring the first born animals and kill them and give them to God as a sacrifice. That way the priests were provided for, since they owned no land, and God was honored as the rightful owner of the people and all he had given them. And sin was symbolically made up for by the grace of God not causing the sinner to die. I want you to note this example.

◆""But you must not redeem the firstborn of an ox, a sheep or a goat; they are holy. Sprinkle their blood on the altar and burn their fat as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD." Numbers 18:17, NIV.

◆The terms "holy" or set apart, and "pleasing" refer to the sacrifice. It reminded the people that they were supposed to be set apart for God, but sin required death. Something has to satisfy, or "please" God's justice. God would ultimately fulfill

## ***THE CHURCH WITH MANY MINISTERS, ROMANS 12:1-8***

Pax Romana 28

every one of those sacrifices with the death of his Son, our Lord and Master, Jesus. Now notice our text:

◆“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.” Romans 12:1, NIV.

◆Some translations say “reasonable service” for “spiritual act of worship”, which I think is better. The greek says “logical ministry” (λογικην λατρειαν). So Paul is saying, what makes the most sense is that since you are not dying, live for Christ now. Set yourself apart/ consider yourself a sacrificed offering that stays alive to serve God.

◆**B.** This is how some of you have lived here in the church. This is what God meant for his church family: our love for God is best lived out in love for people. Just like the summary of all God’s laws says: Love God above all and your neighbor as yourself. (Matt.22). We could simply put it, love God by loving your neighbor. Your neighbor is the God-ordained recipient of all you owe God. Did not Jesus teach in Matthew 24 that everything we do for others we are doing for him? You need to realize that when you model Christ you are doing ministry! You are transforming rather than conforming. It’s easy to conform to the world. The world says live for yourself, get everything you can. The renewed mind of Christ says live for others, give everything you can. Why would anyone do that?

## ***THE CHURCH WITH MANY MINISTERS, ROMANS 12:1-8***

Pax Romana 28

◆C. Lets return for a moment to the towering motivation for being a non-dead sacrifice. It's the reason why God-followers are like this. God's mercy is our motivation for being a living sacrifice. It's in that little phrase "In view of God's mercy."(v1) Do you remember what those mercies are? All that Paul has been saying so far in Romans. How every single person in history is lost in and dominated by sin they cannot beat, or make up for. How God cannot let sin live on, but destroys it by his holy nature (ch 1-3). How God made a way for sinful humans to get to live, really live here, and eternally live in heaven –by sending Jesus to be our sacrifice received by faith in his name, not by religious deeds (ch4-8). How we ought to be literally knocked off our feet when we realize (ch9-11) that God ordained this, spelled this out, premeditated and predestined people to receive this gift of faith with such sovereign control that if ever you come to realize that he has called to YOU you can be sure you are safe in his arms. You have dodged the bullet of sin and death and it had nothing to do with your goodness, your wisdom, your right answer. The Father makes sure he gives to Jesus all his sheep!

◆In view of this mercy! It's like saying, "Since you've won the lottery.." or "Seeing as how you are so wealthy.." or "Now that you've hit the big time..." In view of God's mercy... That's who you are in Christ; the wealthiest of humans, the most blessed of people, those with the most secure future even after Social Security runs out, people

## ***THE CHURCH WITH MANY MINISTERS, ROMANS 12:1-8***

Pax Romana 28

who will never have to be turned away, or die in sin. In view of God's mercy...

◆ Now then, some of you really live this way and you need to know that not only is God worshipped by you and praised, but we are all blessed too. I'm talking about those who are ready to burst out of the starting gate when we need help. Those of you who are quick to labor even in quiet ways behind the scenes, unnoticed by the masses. You come in and quietly paint the nursery, or fix the ceiling where the water drips, or hang a door. You are on a team to be creative, or serve refreshments. You who hang around and clean up the kitchen since we don't have a janitor around here. You who teach three first-graders a bible story, or twist a thousand little knobs on the sound board.

◆ You need to know that this is a pleasing sacrifice to God your Father! And that he delights in you. He smiles at your "yes'es when asked to help. Even your minuscule acts like picking up a child instead of standing behind your cup of coffee, even in these you are doing ministry. And we thank you.

◆ **2. Some ministry principles.** So up to this point Paul has outlined a Christian worldview. Starting with Chapter 12 he begins to make a lot of concrete applications about how we live. In summary he's telling us how to be God's ministers in the world. Any commitment to serving God by serving people carries potential joys as well as disillusionments or burnouts. No pastor

## ***THE CHURCH WITH MANY MINISTERS, ROMANS 12:1-8***

Pax Romana 28

can be everybody's best friend. But you could be someones. No giver can give enough to pay every bill. But you could help. No elder can advise you in every family situation, but they can in some. No speaker can connect with everyone listening. No single greeter can reach every attender before they leave lonely. Even superman will go nuts if he thinks he's supposed to be God. He's not. So lets learn some perspectives on being a living sacrifice.

◆ **A. Serve where you are gifted.** Every Christian is gifted by God in unique ways (v4-6). If you want to see similar lists of giftedness check out Ephesians 4, 1Corinthians 12. Now that means that trying to teach 3rd grade when you are not wired to enjoy kids will lead to burn out quite quickly. If you are gifted with your hands, and crafty, maybe you need to say no when they ask you to sing so you feel open to decorate or create a carnival booth. What would it be like if every person was say, an eyeball? We'd have a hundred some eyeballs rolling around church and nobody could eat a donut! We need you in your place!

◆ On the contrary when you are serving where God has gifted you it's almost not even work, am I right? Those of us who love guitars for example, playing with a praise team is like being invited over for ice cream! Guitarists are notorious for fiddling around on their instrument while the leader is instructing. It's because it's play for us! If you love cameras or videography, well then we should have you making ours around here! If we knew

## ***THE CHURCH WITH MANY MINISTERS, ROMANS 12:1-8***

Pax Romana 28

people who loved to do drama we'd be able to do that a lot more around here. That's ministry too. Satan will tell you those aren't big things, and they make no difference, and no one will miss it if you say no. He's wrong. Furthermore, if you feel like your area of service is pure duty and you can't wait to get out of it, you're probably not where God wired you for. Every Christian has gifts. We have a whole class to help you figure them out if you don't know what they are.

◆**B.** Serve with a true servants heart. v3 Paul talks a lot about how we think, about renewing our mind. When the leader of the Navigators was asked how you know if you have a servants heart, he said, "By how you act when you are treated like one." If you are thinking, why do I have to do this? you probably aren't letting your heart be a servant's heart. If you feel over-qualified for a task and so wait for someone else, your servants heart is being muffled. If you can't stop thinking about what people are thinking of you while you serve, then you are smothering your servant heart.

◆**C.** Serve for the right reasons. Remember, it's in view of mercy, or considering how rich God has made you! It's not to make points. It's not to do God a favor. It's not because if we don't someone may end up in hell for our failure. No, God does not need us. He's the sovereign predestining redeemer, remember? He could do it better with a rock if he wanted to, so don't break your arm patting yourself on the back. But he wants us to be his

## ***THE CHURCH WITH MANY MINISTERS, ROMANS 12:1-8***

Pax Romana 28

skin. He delights when we are. 1) It's to say thanks. 2) It's because God is worthy! God is always worthy. 3) It's to meet Christ in this world. You see, the more we live like Christ, the more we experience his spiritual presence in this life! When you pray with someone, when you go out of your way to give someone a ride when you could be drinking tea and watching TV, when you stop by to say hi... you are increasing your God-vision. You are all the more likely to hear from God, notice God, etc.

Henri Nouwen said

◆“What then is it that we receive in ministry? Is it the hidden insights and skills of those to whom we want to bear witness? Maybe so...but that can never be the true source of our own growth. Seeing how a person slowly becomes aware of his or her own capacities might make us happy for a while, but that is not enough for a grateful life. A grateful life is a life in which we come to see that the Lord himself is the gift. The mystery of ministry is that the Lord is found where we minister. That is what Jesus tells us when he says “as much as you did for the least of these...” Our care for people thus becomes the way to meet the Lord.”

◆**Conclusion:** Perhaps you have heard from the Holy Spirit even in this hour. Perhaps today it has dawned on you that real living isn't in getting out of as much as you can, or getting as much as you can. Perhaps today you are beginning to realize that God created you for purposes and with abilities and a place in the

## ***THE CHURCH WITH MANY MINISTERS, ROMANS 12:1-8***

Pax Romana 28

puzzle of life. That God's church is less a cruise liner and more a aircraft carrier.

◆ *"The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen." 1 Peter 4:7-11, NIV.*

◆ Look folks, this is the very nature of our resurrected Master! He was a servant who gave his life. We get salvation and forgiveness out of it. The result is more life, eternal life. Bank on being Jesus with skin on. You know how that turns out in the end! Furthermore, you can afford it. "In view of God's mercies... offer yourself..."