

## Practical Theology 101-Romans 12

ILL: "You're so heavenly minded you're no earthly good." Some of you will recognize these words from Johnny Cash's song, "No Earthly Good". Judging by the language of the song Johnny seems to have had the church in mind.

**The sentiment of this song is that Christian's have kept their theology stored up in their minds, but when it comes to real life stuff happening around them, they're practically useless. They seem to have their heads stuck in the clouds, clueless to the needs of ppl, right in front of them.**

Cash says, "If you're holding heaven, then spread it around. There's hungry hands reaching up here from the ground." **And while many in the church may scoff at Johnny's critique, deeming him unqualified to criticize b/c of his lifestyle, or fame, or career. Maybe us Christians would do well to humble ourselves and to listen more carefully to what outsiders are saying about us. And if the shoe fits, we need to own our failures and ask God for new mercies to forgive us and empower us to be ppl who are both heavenly minded and earthly good.**

TRANS: **Church, this morning I'd like us to consider our Practical Theology. And we'll do this by looking at Romans Ch.12.** So as you flip there let me remind you that in Romans ch.1-11 we see how the living God meets us in our rebellion and changes us by the message of His Son. He then comes to live in our hearts by His Holy Spirit who continually changes us to be like Jesus. And this God is still actively working and intervening in other peoples lives as they call on Jesus throughout history and throughout the world. This is the good news that Paul expounds in the first 11 chapters. **And**

when he gets to the end of ch.11, he breaks into praise. **Romans is a great lesson in practical theology b/c it takes us through heart enlarging theology, to heart expressing praise then to heart engaged action. The first 11 chapters provide the leverage for his direct, surgical applications of Scripture into the life of the church.** And since Romans was written not to theology students but to a church full of sinners like ours, Romans is an excellent place to be trained in Practical Theology 101. **Now I've said this word 'theology' a few times, so what do I mean by this?** **John Frame** whose been a theologian for decades defines theology this way: **"theology is the application of Scripture, by persons, to every area of life."**

APP: So Calvary, as a church would you say we're good at applying Scripture to every area of our life? **So, is our theology mere theory or is it breaking into practice as we live? Do our Praises of God end here on Sunday's? Or do they come with us into all the corners of our life? And for those of us who are good at applying Scripture to others, are we as good at applying it to ourselves? This morning I'd like us to start with the man or woman in the mirror. This passage will require us to make some surgical strikes of Scripture onto our hearts. I'd like all of us who love Jesus to consider whether or not we're good practical theologians. And by that I don't mean have we arrived? But I do mean \*are we still applying Scripture to the way we think and live, as we think and live? Is our love for Jesus, still changing the way we practice what we preach?**

ILL: Author of "My Utmost for His Highest", **Oswald Chambers**, says: **"The test of my love for Jesus is the practical one, all the rest is sentimental jargon."**

TRANS: This morning is sure to be a test of our love for Jesus. Our theology ought to be lived out in God and neighbor. **And as we begin I want to say that if you have ears to hear, and you're breathing, this chapter will challenge you. I believe the Holy Spirit will do a cross examination of all of our hearts through this text. And as He does we'll keep the gospel close by to apply Scripture to ourselves, like a good practical theologian should.** In Romans 12, this morning we're going to see that: **Receiving God's mercies in Christ changes how we think and live. Now before we dive in, let's ask God to work His word into our hearts this morning.**

PRAY

TRANS: The first thing this text shows us is that: **1. Receiving God's mercies in Christ changes who we worship v.1-2**

*"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

TEACH: **This passage is like a bridge from theology and doxology into practice. And in v.1 Paul is giving us the gospel as the motivation and empowerment to live for God.** Notice what he says in v.1: *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God,"* **Here is the pastoral tone and touch for true life change. I want you to notice that Paul doesn't scold these believers into action. Paul knows that heart change and our practical theology starts by receiving the mercies of God! Which sums**

**up the Gospel he's been expounding. The mercies of God describe God's goodness to us in our rebellion and misery through Jesus. And we receive these mercies when we meet Christ in hearing and trusting the Gospel. So Paul is giving us an opportunity to fasten the eyes of our heart on the mercies of God personified in Jesus.** And what effect do these mercies have? Well their supposed to change how we think and live.

ILL: As **J Gresham Mehan** said years ago: **"Christianity transformed the lives of men not by appealing to the human will, but by telling a story. The lives of men are transformed by a piece of news."**

TRANS: The piece of news that transforms is about a merciful Savior. And He's been actively transforming lives through this piece of news for centuries. And He's still transforming lives today. **Have you met Christ in mercy yet?**

Listen to what **Thomas Watson**, says, **"It is the great design of the Scripture to present God as merciful... the mercies of God have a melting influence upon the soul; they dissolve it in love to God. God's judgments make us fear Him, His mercies make us love Him."** **And when we glimpse God's mercies in Christ, and His Spirit fills us with His love, what happens? We want to love him back don't we? And how do we do this?** Back to v. 1, in view of the mercies of God, *"present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."* **Now, since we're about to get into many commands, I want to encourage you not to take your eyes off the mercies of Christ. His mercies include His personal presence in us to motivate and empower us to live how God tells us to live. And as you'll notice from the flow of Romans, since**

**God makes us holy and acceptable through Christ now He calls us to be holy, which is really calling us to be consistent with who God says we are. God's mercy isn't just the key to getting into Christ but it's also the key to becoming more like Christ, day by day.**

**TRANS: And the way we become more like Christ is surprising. It's to take up our cross and follow Him. It's to present our bodies, meaning our whole person as a living sacrifice in worship to the living God. Scripture shows us that a life rearranged by the mercies of God changes our deepest heart commitments. We don't live for ourselves or our sin anymore. We're new creatures. We have new desires now. We stop living for our dreams, pick up a cross and follow Jesus. B/c our life is not our own, we were bought with a price. By mercy.**

**APP: This would be a good time to ask ourselves: how are we doing?** Does this sound like our life? Have the mercies of God in Christ taken root in you? Has it produced a change in who you live for? **Are you all in with Jesus? Do you want to live for Christ who died and rose again on your behalf? Or are you living for yourself still? \*If you haven't met God in mercy yet, please tell someone before you leave. Today is the day to come and close with Jesus. Ask around there are many ppl here who can help you find Him.**

**TRANS:** More on living as a sacrifice in v.2: *2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."*

**TEACH:** We Christian's are not to be conformed to this world but we are to be continually transformed by the renewal of our mind. Bathing them as it were in the mercies of God. **The world has many voices calling our name. And the world here is referring to powers, systems and people in rebellion against God. Every Their voice is seeking to interpret and influence our way of thinking and living. Whether its in the news, our favorite podcasts, sports, or tic-tock the world is striving to lead us astray. And one way the ways the world does this is by deleting God from the picture it presents to us. The voices we listen to are not neutral. So Christian, the question for us is this: who are we listening to? The world tells us to follow our heart, and Jesus tells us to follow Him, who are we listening to? We Christian's must resist the worlds influences and interpretations of life and be renewed by the gospel. And how can we do this? Sinclair Ferguson** says this is how: **"As the greatness of the gospel begins to fill and to expand our minds, as we come to know God's Son, through God's word, by God's Spirit, a process of change takes place in our thinking, feeling, desiring, willing and living. God's word and Spirit work together and actively and powerfully change us."**

**APP: And that mind renewal gives us the wisdom to discern the will of God, when life is not straight forward. The process of change is slow, but God's Spirit is working through the word in us and on us.** Is your mind still being renewed by the gospel? By the Scripture? This is the way the mercies of Christ change who we worship. Next notice: **2. Receiving God's mercies in Christ changes how we think about ourselves v.3**

TEACH: As we proceed through the rest of this passage I'll be giving an overview. **But if there's anything at all that challenges you today in this text, take note of it and your homework as a practical theologian will be to seek God for the heart change required to apply and obey these commands.** In v.3 Paul addresses the whole church. He says, "I say to everyone among you", **so too today the rest of this text is addressed to every believer in this room, and online.** What's the charge for us V.3 "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned."

Of v.3 Kent Hughes says: **"Paul is not asking the believer to estimate himself according to changing subjective feelings, but to estimate himself according to his relationship with Christ... A clear focus on Christ then is the key to thinking rightly about ourselves and should be the goal of our spiritual practice."**

APP: Now church let's apply this Scripture to ourselves. Are we thinking of ourselves or our church more highly than we ought to? **Have we become puffed up and self-aggrandizing?** Do we think we're the king and everyone else should bow down to us? Or are we living for King Jesus and thinking of ourselves as ppl in relationship with Him?

TRANS: Well, the gospel changes and is changing not only how we think about ourselves but also how we think about the church. Look at v.4-5 where we see: **3. Receiving God's mercies in Christ changes how we think about the church v.4-5** "For as in one body we have many members, and the

members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

TEACH: This verse describes the church as a body. We the church are different members in a whole body. **So don't think of membership in a church like a membership at a gym. That's not the NT picture. Think of the church rather as members, body parts or 'limbs' linked to Christ [the head] and linked to one another.** Is this the way you think of the church? A body in which you're connected into?

TRANS: By the way I should say if you're interested in becoming a member here, tonight on zoom at 7pm, I'm running our membership class. So let me know if you want to attend. Next we see that: **4. Receiving God's mercies in Christ changes how we think about our gifts v.6-8.** <sup>6</sup> Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; <sup>8</sup> the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."

TEACH: Now we've just seen that the church is one body with many different connected members. **And now we see one way these differences can play out in the life of the church. Each believer has been given gifts by the Holy Spirit.** And Paul lists 7 gifts here, and sadly I won't have time to explain these today. However, I do need to mention that these gifts have a purpose in the church. As 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, Spiritual gifts are given to us "for the

common good". **That is to say that however God has graciously gifted you, the point of your gift is not to toot your own horn but to serve others with it. God gave each believer a gift not so we could look good in our church but so we could do good to our church.** God placed us in a church body and within that body we all have different functions. And we're meant to serve God and others with our gifts.

**APP: Now if we want to find out your gifts to serve here, let me encourage you, get involved in the life of the church. Join a small group. Take a look at the 'Service team needs' in the bulletin this morning** And let me or Pastor Matt know where you'd like to serve. **And as you serve, I believe God's Spirit, Word and Church will help you discern your gift.**

**TRANS:** Now let's get into some of the most poignant and concrete stuff of practical theology. In v.9-21 we see that: **5. Receiving God's mercies in Christ changes how we respond to others v.9-21.** Now remember, this whole passage is addressed to the whole church. **Which means, no matter what our spiritual gifts are, we don't get a pass to disobey any of these commands. This is the practical test of our love for Jesus. If we're following Jesus this is how we follow him into the details of life. And we need to keep His mercy close by. B/c it is by His mercy that He melts our hearts to even want to apply the Scriptures to our hearts.** This is the work of a practical theologian. Remember **John Frame's** definition: **"theology is the application of Scripture, by persons, to every area of life."** With this in mind let's read v.9-21. "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is

good. <sup>10</sup> Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. <sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup> To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

**TEACH:** **This is not the kind of passage we read and then say, 'man I'm killin' it'. This text confronts every one of us in our apathy, self-righteousness and hypocrisy doesn't it?** In those verses we're commanded to do over 20 things. **And this is difficult, not because the commands are difficult to understand but b/c these commands make something immediately clear to us: We aren't living the way we ought to.** None of us are. **Us Christians read this and feel the Holy Spirit cross examining us into a corner, don't we? B/c we know we're great sinners and we fall and fail daily! But it is here in these feelings of guilt and failure that we must look again at the mercies of Christ. We must remember we need Christ in**

**us to live the Christian life through us. We need God to be at work with us and in us to shape and make us into the kind of people that this passage is speaking of.**

**APP:** Now since we have baptisms this morning, I don't have time to go through all of these commands. But I'd like to encourage every one of you, to be a practical theologian. And to do your own homework on this passage and on your own heart. Here's how. **If there is any command in this text that sticks out to you as particularly timely, challenging and personal. Write it down, take it home, run the command through the mercies of Christ, apply it to yourself, and meditate on it until it starts changing the way you think and live. That's your homework. Now here's your motivation: God is with you.** If you've been born again; His Spirit lives in you. Your journey of obedience is not a solo project. **God is at work on you and in you to make you more like Jesus. More willing and joyfully obedient to Him. But before we go I'd like to shine the light on one command that I've found particularly relevant and timely for me.** I'd like to look at v.21: *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*"

**APP:** Over the past few months, this has become the most challenging and beautiful verse for me. I've needed it and feasted on it many times. It answers this question: **How do we respond to people when they hurt or harm us. When ppl lie, manipulate, use and abuse us what do we do, and where do we go? (As believers) Some of you have experienced the sharp edge of betrayal. And you know that evil, is cold, hard and cruel. This verse**

**doesn't make excuses for evil but it calls a spade a spade. Scripture knows better than us that evil is a real power and problem in our world. But this verse is concerned with our response to evil. How do we respond in the face of evil? Do we go with our gut and start planning a counter attack? \*Paul is saying here, to everyone in the church that, when evil comes at you, you can either crumble under its power, letting it warp you into an evildoer, or you can overcome evil with good. \*B/c when evil comes at us from the outside it appeals to the evil inside of us to come out. Yes, Christian, you and I still have a squatter in our hearts, there's a resident evil living inside. But we who are Christian's have the mercies and power of the living God in us. We're to respond to evil, differently than the world. How is this possible?**

Enter **David Powlison:** *"The mercies of God work to forgive and then to change what is deeply evil, but even more deeply curable by God's hand and voice...We can be fundamentally rewired by the merciful presence of the Messiah."* **The evil that every Christian needs to be most concerned with overcoming is the evil that looks back at us in the mirror.**

**CONCL:** Church let's not forget, we're all great sinners. But Christ came to save sinners just like us. May God help us to apply these Scriptures to our hearts until Jesus returns.

**PRAY**