

Life in the Body: A People , Not Just a Crowd

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[0 : 00] It's absolutely great to go consistently through a book. But I thought it might be good. And in God's providence, as the elders discussed, just trying to be a help to the body.

One of the elders, Paul, mentioned a topic that we all thought, this is essential. This is important. So we're going to spend six weeks on this series.

I'll talk about that in just a minute. Six weeks on this series about life in the body. Let me read a passage from Psalm 16, verses 5 and 6.

It says, The Lord has chosen my portion and my cup. You hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.

Indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. Now, as I look out over this congregation, and as I look at you folks, and I'm purposely not stopping on anybody in particular, I know that some of you would say, doesn't feel like the lines have fallen to me in really good places.

[1 : 20] It doesn't feel like the Lord has chosen my lot. I don't say this is the best situation that God could put me in.

Christian, you may not realize it, but these verses describe your situation. Now, there are trials, and there are struggles.

But where you are, you are because of the mercies of God. Now, we can talk about all the things that go into that in your life.

And we can go to Romans 8, 28 and talk about all the things that tie into that. And that would be a great thing for us to do. But I'm going to back up. And in the series that we talk about, we're going to talk about the situation God has put you in for your benefit, for your good.

I know this still sounds like Romans 8, 28, but what he's put you in is such a huge blessing that we want to talk about how God has blessed us by putting us in a body.

[2 : 37] And so today we start a short series called Life in the Body, Our Response to God's Grace. And the goal is for us to see how the Word of God shows that as his mercy is, how his mercy has saved us, and he's put us in a body of believers where we serve him and one another based on the mercies of God.

We don't serve him and one another because we're trying to earn something, trying to make everybody around us conform to our thinking.

We serve him and one another because of the mercies of God that are spoken of in the gospel. And I asked you to turn to Romans chapter 12.

I'm going to read the first five verses here as we begin. In Romans chapter 12, verses 1 through 5, Scripture says, 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.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God and what is good and acceptable and perfect. 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.

[4 : 21] For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another.

Let's pray together. Father, I thank you for what you've done for us. We've already spoken your praise in so many ways today.

Not enough, not grand enough, not all that you deserve, but Lord, the privilege of speaking your praise has been a blessing. And now, Lord, as we come to your word, and we think about life in the body, I pray that you would show us, first of all, just how blessed we are, and then show us how we ought to be people taking advantage of that blessing because of your goodness.

And so, Father, I pray that you would be with us. Help us to understand your word, and that you would lead us in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. The first, in the first 11 chapters of the book of Romans, Paul has been laying out the gospel.

He has shown us our sin and rebellion. He has shown us his provision of grace and salvation through the work of Christ.

[5 : 45] He has shown us that not only have our sins been paid for, but he has provided for our deliverance from the power of sin, that he will most certainly make us to be like Christ, and that nothing will separate us from him for all eternity.

And it's all been the work that God has done. All through these first 11 chapters, it's the work that God has done, and the standing we get to have as we stand in the work that God has done.

It has been provided for us. It is by his mercies. Christian, if you're trusting Christ today for your standing before God, it is because of his mercies.

It's because of what he has done, both in opening your eyes and drawing you to himself, in also the idea of providing all that you needed in your standing before God, it's all been his mercies.

And this passage speaks of the mercies of God and our reaction to the mercies of God. And if we were just to back up a couple of verses into chapter 11, we'll see that as Paul has been dealing with these wonders, now Paul couldn't help himself.

[7 : 23] It happens in other places in those first 11 chapters. But as he gets to the end of his argument of the mercies of God and what he's done for us and what he's provided, Paul is moved to worship as he finishes explaining what God has done in his mercy for us.

Let me read verses 33 to 36. As he summed this all up, he says, Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable or can't find out his ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid for from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be glory forever and ever. Now, it's not that Paul sits down and does nothing, but it's almost as if Paul falls back in his chair and goes, Oh, what God has done is just amazing.

And as you were to personally walk through the steps, the teachings, the instructions of Romans in the first 11 chapters, you see that God has done this, God has done that, God has done this, God has done that.

[8 : 44] And he's drawn you to himself and he's done it all. And Paul is just overwhelmed with the work that God has done. Man was dead and helpless in his own sin and he could do nothing about his condition.

God in disabundant mercy provided everything that man needed for redemption. We've been saved by the unspeakable mercies of God and he deserves all the glory.

God doesn't owe anyone anything. No one gave him something and they can come back to God. So now, you remember I gave you that?

I'm just going to ask for a little bit of eternal life. God did everything. We owe him everything. And yet, the giving doesn't stop there.

This is where I'm going to begin to talk about, I mean, we will sing for all eternity on what we can learn from the first 11 chapters, what we see of God's work in the first 11 chapters.

[9 : 58] We will sing for all eternity of God's goodness, of his abundant mercies. But he continues. It's not just all that he's done in providing for salvation.

He's also provided us a situation, a place, a setting, where he continues to bless us.

And so Paul calls us to action. As we've looked at the beginning of chapter 12 here, it says, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God. He appeals for our action.

And he has a foundation for this. And his foundation is the gospel. It is always the gospel. It is always what God has done for us.

It is never what we have racked up and tried to accumulate of what we could do for God. God calls us to action always based on what he has done for us. You say, really?

[11 : 06] If you were to look at the book of Colossians, chapters 1 and 2, you would see that there, again, he lays the gospel for the, of the foundation of the gospel there in chapters 1 and 2, and then calls us to action based on the gospel in chapter 3.

Chapter 3, verse 1 says, if then, all that Christ has done, and he argues that we're raised with Christ because of his work, if then you have been raised with Christ, seek things that are above.

If God has done all this work for you, then you're called to action based on that work. We could go to the book of Ephesians. Paul gave the foundation of the gospel in the first three chapters of the book of Ephesians, laid it all out, even going back to before the foundation of the world and how he foreordained and foreknew and elected and drew and worked, and then goes through the grace that God showed in doing all that, and from before the foundation, the gospel is, it's just a work of the gospel, and Paul lays that foundation of the gospel in the first three chapters, and then he calls us in the beginning of chapter 4 and from 4 through 6 to action based on the gospel.

Ephesians 4.1, I, therefore the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called. gospel is laid out.

He calls us to action. Never to earn something before God, always because of what God has done for us. Paul does the same thing here in Romans.

[12:55] He spent 11 chapters laying the foundation of the gospel throughout all these chapters, and we've already rehearsed that, and that he calls us to action in chapters 12 through 16.

In verse 1, he says, 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.

He calls us to serve. Now, he's talking about our initial reaction personally, and then he goes into what we will address mostly here.

But in response to the gospel, we are called to serve. Our life and our service are always to be about the reaction to the abundant mercies of God.

So everything that you can look at from chapter 12, verse 1, through chapter 16, God calls you to do because you owe a debt.

[14:01] A debt towards God's mercy. It's not a debt we, oh, we moan or groan under. It's a debt we rejoice under.

It's a debt we joy and praise the Lord over. But we have a debt, and we're called to worship and serve and live based on the abundant mercies of God.

Since God has provided salvation based on his mercies, in the first two verses, we're to present ourselves to him as living sacrifices. Our life's not our own.

God showed all those mercies. Our life's not our own. We live as though our life is our own.

We make our plans. We make and plan things, and we set out how we're going to do something all based on what we want in life. Since God has provided salvation based on his mercy, we should present ourselves to him as living sacrifices.

[15:14] Christian, everything you do should reflect your thankfulness for the mercies of God towards you. Everything you do.

Living for Christ is the appropriate reaction to the mercies of God. Living for Christ is the appropriate reaction to the mercies of God.

Now that ties in with what we're getting at. But here is where we're going to see how life in the body is something that is a result of God's goodness.

I mentioned to you at the beginning from Psalm... I forgot what the Psalm was. Psalm 16.

Thank you. Psalm 16. The lines have fallen to us in pleasant places. We live in pleasant places because of God's goodness to us.

[16:25] And one of those pleasant places is that we have been placed in a body.

We've been placed amongst other believers. So since God has provided salvation based on his mercy, he didn't just stop there.

He placed us in the body. Since he's put us in that body, we're to serve the body of Christ, the church, as living sacrifices.

God has put us here. And I don't want you to do it right now. But you can look around. God has put the people that are sitting around you here to help you and for you to help.

Well, I don't want to be bothered with that. Oh, really? In light of the mercies of God, you think that that's something easy to brush off?

[17:38] Though God has blessed you with putting you in this situation? Since he in mercy has saved you.

And since he in mercy has placed you in a body, we as Christians should serve the body of Christ as living sacrifice. Now, verses four and five talks about how we're members of a body, members one of another.

And what do we mean by body? Body is a frequent analogy that Paul uses in Scripture. A body is a unit made up of inseparable parts.

Our bodies are made up of our head, our torso, our limbs, internal organs, external organs, all those things comprise a body. And the church is like a body.

Christ is the head, but we are parts of that body. And Paul uses this analogy in several places in Scripture. What is he getting at?

[18 : 49] He's getting at the idea that God has put us in a body and just like the body serves one another, so we are to serve one another.

Each person plays a part in the local body of believers. believers. We need each other. If you look at our body, I need my hand.

I have itches that sometimes need to be scratched. I have much more desperate needs than that that are addressed by my hand. And God put us in a body with people who he will use to meet our needs.

And God has put us in a body where he will use us to meet the needs of others. Each person plays a part in the local body of believers.

And so as we sit here and we think about the body that God has assembled here, we need each other. God designed the group of believers who are gathered here at Grace Fellowship Church for the specific needs of one another.

[20 : 22] And so there's no one who is a believer in this group that you can say, I don't need that person. God is a person. It takes all parts of the body for the body to be healthy and effective.

It takes all of us serving one another for the local body of believers to be healthy and effective. we could go into some of the things that we'll talk about here.

We're going to build this out and how we understand this as we go on, but we need each other in the body and God has put us here as part of his abundant mercies.

Yes, we'll get it. And he speaks of some of those things in verses 6 through 21. We're not going to address all these things.

Let me just mention down through several of them. We're to have a correct view of ourselves and one another, a view that stands on the gospel. That's part of how we minister to one another.

[21 : 30] We serve one another with the gifting that God gives us. Some have the gift of helps. Some have the gift of giving. Some have various gifts and we all serve one another with these gifts.

God has put us together that we might genuinely love one another. God has put us together to live in a holy manner as an encouragement and a help to one another.

God has put us together to outdo one another in showing honor. God has to you know, I care for you, your needs above mine, my desire to be a help to you.

We outdo one another in showing honor, not slothful in zeal, the passage goes on to talk about, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, having desire to know the Lord and to encourage one another in knowing the Lord and serving one another.

we help each other rejoice and hope. We're here to do that. We're here to help each other remember the promises, remember the truths, remember what's ahead, remember what Christ has done.

[22 : 51] We're here as a body to do that. We help each other rejoice and hope. We help each other be patient in tribulation because again, we remind one another of truths.

We remind one another of how God has been faithful to each of us in the past. We're here as a body to help each other be patient in tribulation. We're here to be constant in prayer for one another.

We're here to help each other be constant in prayer for one another, for the lost, for those who are out and about. Body that God has put together.

God put us together to help us meet each other's needs. I've been so thankful. Different times I've started up a conversation and gotten to know people and as they've talked to me and we've discussed issues, realized that maybe they had a talent that was a big help to me.

Or maybe they had some way of helping me see myself that was a very big help to me. Meeting the needs of others.

[24 : 01] the body helps us have a proper relationship with those in and outside the body. And this last statement really covers chapters 13 through 16 as he talks about governments and people who are offended and all this stuff.

The body helping one another to be people who relate rightly because of the mercies of God towards those who are in authority over us, to those who might be offended by some of the things that we would do or say.

The body is there to help us. God in his mercy has gathered us together to help each other go on for the Lord.

He's put us in the body. And Paul presents this blessed inclusion into the body not as something we choose to be or not be part of.

You say, what are you getting at? We often look at church membership as something that is optional. We often look at interacting with one another as something that is optional.

[25 : 26] You'll not find in scripture any hint of a believer having an optional responsibility to anyone else in the church.

And we need to be wise in how we carry out our things. And, you know, maybe we're not always the best. But God never says, I'm going to save a group of people and half of them are going to go to church.

He never says, it's okay if a quarter of them never commit to ministering to one another in the body. God always teaches, God always brings on in scripture the assumption that his people are a part of the body and that they do have responsibilities.

and never looks at it as, well, when you get mature enough to be a help, you'll decide to be an active part of the church. He assumes it.

[26 : 32] From the moment you trust Christ, God assumes that you will be a ministering part of the body.

God so it's not something we choose, now, we do choose to join a local church. All Christians are part of the universal church, but we choose to be part of a local church.

But what I'm getting at is, whether it be, we're part of the universal church, but a local church, God never assumes that you will choose, that maybe you will choose to be part of a church.

He assumes that you are going to be a part of the church. The duties brought out in Romans 12 and other places of scripture do not hint that the next good step for a person after they trust Christ as Savior should be that they decide, I think I might join a church.

As I mentioned, this passage and others assume that all Christians will covenant together in a local body to carry out the one anothering needed for the body.

[27 : 40] one anothering passages are all through the New Testament. And God assumes that people will become part of that body.

It is one of the blessings that he's given them. And again, it's not a constraint, it's a blessing. It's something that God has looked at people and said, this is what they need.

I've been gracious to provide salvation, I'm not going to let them stay there, I'm not going to leave them at some point, I'm going to take them on, I'm going to put them in a situation where they can continue to grow, I'm going to put them in a situation where they can be helped to grow.

So the only place where a Christian can survive, flourish, and properly fulfill the duties that are appropriate responses to God's mercy, is within the local covenanted community, the local church. People who call themselves Christians, and this is, I'm not trying to bash people, people who call themselves Christians and do not, and choose not to associate themselves covenantally with a local church, are starving themselves, they're hindering themselves, they're hurting themselves, they're making themselves weak, God has designed this place, not just Grace Fellowship Church, but local bodies of believers, for the care and nurture and one anothering of his people.

[29 : 24] It is God's ordinary plan for Christians to be known, accountable, and committed to a local body of believers.

Is that God endeavoring to be bureaucratic, or is that God intending to be some great old man wielding a stick in the sky?

No, that is his tender mercies. God is how he's going to continue to help them. So let me ask this, what's your relationship with the local body of Christ?

I'm going to say this up front because in our day and age, too often this is the thought. Let me say it this way, if you're not sure you're going to heaven, membership is not another step to take to make sure you're getting to heaven.

Membership doesn't earn you anything. If you're afraid of dying and going to hell, your next step is not membership in the church, but repentance and trusting Christ.

[30 : 44] But membership is the logical, normal reaction of one who has trusted Christ. So let me ask again, what is your relationship to the local body of believers, to the local body of Christ?

It can't be, well, I'm joining because I want to go to heaven. all that's taken care of by trusting Christ. He's the only hope of salvation. But it is, joining a local church is the proper relationship.

Membership in a local body of believers is God's ordinary plan for his people. several places in the book of Acts, it says that those who were saved were added to the church, added to the number. And those deemed outside of Christ were excluded from the church. Several passages in the New Testament, including the passage here in Romans 12, assume that believers function as a body for the benefit of building itself up.

[32 : 05] if we choose to be like people who attend a football game, you go to a football game, maybe the only thing you have in common is a love for stadium hot dogs and whatever team is playing on the field.

There's no real cohesiveness there. If you look at church as being part of a crowd, rather than being part of a people, it may mean that you're not a Christian.

Becoming a member is where you give testimony of having trusted Christ. Christ. If you look at coming to church as being part of the crowd, rather than being part of the covenanted body, it may mean that as a Christian, you are living in disobedience or rebellion to what the Lord has ordained for all his people.

people. If you are coming to church looking at it as a crowd, rather than a covenanted body, you're missing out on what God has given you for his glory and your good.

God we are here to help one another know Christ, walk with Christ, know him better.

[34 : 01] God designed the body of Christ, the church, as a means by which we grow and we help others grow. God designed the body of Christ, the church, as a means by which we are protected from evil, from error, and helped in temptation.

He designed us to encourage one another. Brother, you're discouraged. Let me remind you of the goodness of the Lord.

Brother, you're walking in a way that's going to end up in trouble. Remember what the Lord says or praying for them, whatever.

coming to church, looking at it as simply a crowd rather than a covenanted body means you're missing out on one of the best things God intended for you as a Christian.

So if you're a Christian, do not miss out on what God in his grace has provided for you. Life in the body. come each week, more than that, covenant to be a part of God's church, that you might be helped, that you might together with all of us glorify the Lord, remain, and help to remain faithful all of our days.

[35 : 30] Let's look at this, this body that God has put together here as what God has provided out of his abundant mercies for us as Christians to help us to walk, to live as unto Christ, and to finish well.

And so we live, are to live, life in the body, and it's to be a response of God's grace, a response to God's grace.

Now over the next five weeks we'll be looking at some of what the Bible teaches about that life in the body, and how we are to be a help to one another, how we are to grow. I've just hit some highlights.

Some of the things we'll touch on again in better ways, in more explanatory ways. But that's our goal. and my burden for you is to see what God has put here as God's abundant mercies.

And avail yourself of that because he has been good to you. Let's pray. Father, I thank you for your word. I thank you, Father, that the more we look at what you've done, the more complete we see, your plan has been.

[37 : 01] You've provided for our ignorance, you've provided for our spiritual blindness, you've provided for our sin and how it affects our lives and our eternal outcome.

You've provided for every aspect of being able to repent and come to know you. And then, Father, you've not said, okay, you've made a decision, we'll see you in 10 or 20 or 30 or 50 years.

Thank you that you have in your mercies determined that we should work together as a body, that we should watch for one another. And I pray that you would be with us.

May we be people who see the importance of that, not just for ourselves, but for one another. And I pray, Father, that you would bless, help us to be people who are worshiping you for the wonder of

your mercies for us in all these ways.
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.