

**Romans 12:1-8**  
**In view of God's mercy**

This is Laura Trott

She is Great Britain's most successful ever Olympian, with 4 gold medals, and she is only 24 years old!

She also has 7 World Championship gold medals, 10 European Championship golds. She is an amazing cyclist!

When I think about all she's done, and what it takes to do that, I know I would *never* be able to achieve what she has! Do you ever think like that?

Partly because of her natural talent, but, as with most Olympians, mainly because of her astonishing commitment.

The amount of training and sacrifice she has made is mind blowing.

She's willing to do that, and she's a hero – I'm not, and that's ok.



There are some things, where I do want to show that level of commitment, that wholeheartedness – where other things do need to move aside. I want to be a good husband, to keep my marriage vows, but more than that to help Sam to flourish, enough that I'll happily make sacrifices in other parts of life.

In any *really* close relationship, we would say the same thing. We realise, it's not a question of some people being committed, and some, if they're not really that bothered, being half hearted. That's not ok, that's not how it should work.

Well what about faith? Is faith one of those things where you can choose your level of commitment.

Some people are more stuck in, or more enthusiastic, and others are just less so.

Some people *want* to talk about God...

Others: "Well we're Christians, but just leave that alone would you"



Is it wrong to try to encourage people to come to church *every* week – to persuade them to prioritise it *over* other things.

Is it wrong to ask people to give a sizable chunk of their hard earned money?

Wrong to expect people to be Christians at work and at home, and not just at church on Sunday?

This passage confronts us with a very challenging idea.

**All Christians should be so whole hearted**, that everything else comes second to God and their faith. Whether family: husband, wife, children, friends, work or blossoming international cycling career. Now of course, under God, those are good things, but they come second to him.

But do you know what, when I look at my own life, I don't see that kind of unwavering wholeheartedness as I should. That kind of committed pursuit of God, which I'm suggesting Laura Trott's commitment to cycling could be a picture of.

And, admitting my own failings, I want to say with all humility, I don't see that as I'd like to in our church either.

This passage is for me, and it's for you as well it gives us *help*, and *instructs* us in that direction. And the first point it makes is this:

1. Give all you are, and do, to the lord  
**"offer yourself"**

I want to suggest, that behind our problem, are two very different ways of thinking about God and his rules. We can think of **rules of an imposing regime**, or **rules of a loving heavenly father**.

And what we're beginning to think about is the difference between fear based obedience (often felt as duty) and love based obedience.

What do I mean by the rules of an imposing regime? Well it's easy to think of examples. Think of a teacher who sets a series of rules with clear and strong punishments. They want their class to behave in a certain way, it's irritating and inconvenient when they don't. In fact, I could push it a little and even go so far as to say, this teacher doesn't care about what people think or feel, just what they do. So if someone keep the rules, but hates the teacher, is filled with resentment and no respect – the teacher doesn't mind – because at least the child isn't irritating them! They use rules and the punishment, to get what they want.

Some people think of God that way – interesting in squashing us and forcing certain behaviours. I wonder if you ever think of God like that, making rules like an imposing regime. Do you follow what he says out of a sense of fear or duty?

You may think that's too negative: Someone might protest that it's possible to think of this rule-and-punishment kind of approach, in a more positive way?

For example a **swear jar** – you know how it works: There's a rule: don't swear, and there's a punishment: put £1 in the jar.

People who want to stop swearing will impose this *on themselves*, in order to stop swearing. Surely that's a more positive outlook on this kind of obedience?

But I want to say, living under the rules of an imposing regime, even if we choose it ourselves, even if we put it there, is not the Christian way, It's not God's way for change.

Crucially, it ultimately leads us to think wrongly about God.

We think he's mean, that he cares about *rules being kept* more than he cares about us, and that he wants to force and impose his way upon us.

Now you can genuinely be a Christian, and still, wrongly, think of God in this way.

Well, motivated by fear, and duty, you'll find

- 1- Over time your motivation completely falls away. You become drained and too tired to care about doing right, it doesn't last.  
Does that describe your Christian journey?

2- You find repentance difficult. Afraid of God's punishment or the consequences he might bring, it is hard to admit your sin to him. Instead, you will often try to rationalise your sin or blame others.

Does that describe you at times?

3- Lastly, with this view of God, you aren't equipped to face suffering. It leaves you feeling desperate and lost like God has abandoned you; or perhaps feeling it's unfair, you kept the rules, so you should be receiving blessings! You feel bitter or you despair. Does that ever describe you?

Wonderfully, a Christian has nothing to fear from God: "there is **now** no condemnation for those who [have faith] in Christ". The kind of obedience a Christian should have is based on their *love* for God. Is that what motivates you?

v1 of our passage is one of the most important verses in this book, and it looks back on the whole of Romans so far: "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"

Do you see what he's saying. He says... Friends, you should give yourselves to God, I urge you to do it, **all** of who you are, your bodies, and your souls, your whole being.

But not just because you *ought* to, or he commands you to: "Brothers and Sisters, **in view of God's mercy**, offer your bodies".

He's taught us what mercy is in romans:

Don't forget, we all sin, you sin!

You deserve, rightly, to be condemned by God. You've turned away from him and his ways, and he ought to cut you off from himself.

It's hard, but right, and every single one of us, whether Jew or Gentile, whether we grew up knowing God's laws or not, deserves hell.

But, God *loves* you.

He sent Jesus Christ, at just the right time. Jesus who never did anything wrong: And Jesus was punished instead of you, God is merciful towards you, he holds back his judgment, he brings you into his family!

All you need to do is have faith in him, and anyone can do that.

So, Christian person, you have received that, isn't that *fantastic*, the way God has dealt with you, how he hasn't condemned you, he's shown mercy to you, and he's brought you permanently into his family, so you can call him Dad.

That should profoundly move us, it should work a deep sense of thanksgiving within us. It should dominate how we view God, who he is – it should give us confidence that He is *for* us, and we can trust him!

So when we hear his rules/ commands, they are from of a loving father!

Just glance down to v9 onwards, you'll see there are loads of commands:

"Love [this], Hate [that], Be devoted... Honour one another... Never be lacking in zeal..." [and so on]

There are loads of commands, and in fact the rest of the book of romans, up to Chapter 16 is packed full of practical instructions, it turns from doctrine to practise.

But more important than doing them, is this.

We must see them as **rules of a loving heavenly father** not **an imposing regime**.

Brothers and Sisters, *in view of God's mercy*, offer yourselves.

Instead of that grumpy teacher, I think about a *loving father*:

Actually, I imagine how *I* would feel if I had a son, or daughter, who was growing up and exploring the world. I imagine them at an age where they can't just work out for themselves what's safe or not, what's right or not.

Well, I'll make rules, and put in structures, to guide and protect them. Of course I will, I love them! If my love for them was perfect, I'd even be willing to suffer myself for their sake, perhaps even willing to die for them.

They're definitely best off doing what I say.

Well it's not too hard for me to swap my role in that scenario.

Actually, I'm the child, God is the father.

He loves me enough to die for me, which Jesus did. Of course I can trust him to guide and help me. Because of how much he loves me, because of all he's done for me - I *want* to please him, I *want* to honour him, I *want* to do things his way!

When I see his rules as the rules of a loving heavenly father, not an imposing regime – that makes all the difference. And friends, God wants much more than us keeping his rules – he loves us(!) **he wants us!** Do you see?

If you do see, and do grasp hold of his mercy by faith, then: there is only one logical thing to do.

V1 literally says “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your **logical** response [or **rational** response] of worship.”

If we've really understood, then there is nothing else which makes sense than to give ourselves to God, all of us.

v1 says that figuratively, in old testament imagery. And v2 speaks literally and explains it.

It means changing inside. We become more like what *God* wants us to be, with a renewed mind. Not conforming, becoming more like the world around us, but being *transformed* by the Holy Spirit inside of us.

And when we do that, it says we will “test and approve” of God's ways – not just a mental agreement that they're best.

What it means is more like examining honey. You hold the jar up, and examine it, you take the lid off, and you dip your finger in. You taste it, and you say “yes, that's it, mmmm so sweet, so good”.

That's how we feel about God's ways, as people who love him, who receive his rules as a loving father and give ourselves to him whole heartedly. We follow his ways, and we approve, we think: mmmm that's sweet, it's really good!



Now I want to move on to consider the rest of our passage, v3-8. Where Paul says, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment”

This fits together with what we've already considered, because it's only after we think about God rightly, that we can think about ourselves rightly.

And we'll see that.

So my second heading is

2. Think rightly about who you are.

CS Lewis once observed that humans tend to be very good at pointing out the problems with others but not so good with themselves.

We have a pride, a certain tendency to approve of ourselves.

Some people don't even notice that. But Christians should be different. We are those who've received God's mercy:

Part of that is to acknowledge we sin and deserve condemnation, but also that God love and forgives us.

If we view ourselves, and others this way, we can't be proud, and think of ourselves as better than others. We know *our* sin, or should do, better than anyone else's.

But we can't think we are worthless, or less than anyone else, God values us with the highest possible price, the life of his only son. Just like others, we are all precious to God.

We are all sinners and all forgiven by him at the same cost.

That's what it means by thinking of yourself in accordance with the faith God has given to you.

(Not that some have more, and some have less, but that you have been given this faith, you should see yourself in that light!)

So, it is bad for us as Christians to either think more highly of ourselves than we ought, OR to think more lowly of ourselves (if I can put it that way).

And you might straight away know which you are more prone to.

But, if we shouldn't think too highly *or* lowly of ourselves, how should we think of ourselves?

The answer our passages gives is: **Uniquely gifted by God for him and each other.**

You may have heard this description before. It comes up in other places in the bible in more detail. Paul says, in a body you have arms, legs, eyes, nose, and so on – all different parts of the body, not the same – and that's a good thing.

If we had nothing but legs we'd be in a lot of trouble, nothing but eyes, it would be really bad – just think: no mouth means no chocolate!

He says that the church is like a body.

Each person is a different part of the body, and each one is *different*, deliberately so!

We shouldn't pick out our differences and think, I can do this really well and feel superior to other people. We're different by design.

We shouldn't look at others gifts, and our failings, and think, I'm no good because I can't do that, we're different by design.

If we were all the same it would be like a body with only eyes, or only legs, disaster!

And v6 says, *everyone* has gifts, you have gifts, God graciously gives them to you.

This is how you *should* think of yourself, as having gifts from God.

He lists some, not all gifts, but some. Listen to how different they are, all different kinds, all from God, by his kindness/grace:

- Prophesying – which means giving God’s explanation of events, and of this world. It doesn’t have to be before they happen, but often whilst they happen or after.

These days the way we see this gift in action, I believe, is mainly through preaching, or other explanations of Gods’ view of this world or things in it.

- Serving: The Greek word here is very clearly about practical service.

Are you on any of our rotas? For cleaning or coffee, that sort of thing? Servers are gifted by God, and they usually don’t need praise or attention, they just get on with things, and do a really good job. They are great team-workers.

I wonder if you have that gift? If you do, then serve.... Use it!

- Teaching: specifically teaching the things of God. Not just from the pulpit – but for example our home group leaders, and our club leaders who are teaching the kids right now! Much harder than preaching, because you’re teaching kids!

I really pray that there are one or two more of you who do have that gift, and with help could learn to lead a kids session: because we need more people to do that teaching – we currently have gaps in the rota when we will have to ask parents to keep their kids in the services.

- To encourage: this is talking about drawing alongside someone and keeping them going. I guess it includes what we might call counselling, but also being a good friend, being good at welcoming and putting someone at their ease.

God just gifts some people to be really good at this, I can think of quite a number here, and what a blessing they are to us as a group.

If that’s you, keep encouraging others. If you’re not sure, encouragers find people seek them out for support, and they are usually very good at noticing who needs help.

All these gifts can grow, why not pray that God would make you, make **us** as a church, better at this.

- Giving: This one is focussed on giving of money. Notice therefore that the gifts are not *only* about character. Some people can give more money, because they’ve got more! The person with this gift will not only give generously, but also wisely, and helpfully! For obvious reasons, the church (the body) needs people like this – and other Christian people need people like this!

I wonder if you have this gift. I’m praying that there are some people who, *in view of God’s mercy*, will after this morning start to give *more* generously some of the money God has already given to them.

- Leading: This is inspiring people to follow, showing the way, a vision for how things could and will be.
- Showing mercy or doing acts of mercy. This is a gift of people specially moved to work with the poor, sick, weak, addicted, elderly and so on.

Some people find they have a particular patience and care. If that’s you, and you do this, then you are to do it v8 with cheerfulness.

These are just some of the gifts God has given to us, I could add administration, prayer, loads more.

We are all different, and we all have gifts.

Don't look at yourself, and proudly think you're marvellous, because all your gifts are given by God, and remember, you are a great sinner.

And don't look at yourself and think you're useless and worthless, you are loved and chosen by God. Try to work out what some of your gifts are. Do you have any of these? Could you develop them even more?

Think rightly about who you are: Uniquely gifted by God for him and each other. And in view of God's mercy... Give all you are, and do, to the lord.