

“Therefore”

August 23, 2026

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Romans 12: 1-8

At the beginning of his letter to the Romans, Paul is not exactly subtle when sharing how he understands the human condition. Back in chapter 1, Paul says God’s power and nature have been obvious from the beginning, yet instead of honoring God and thanking God, starting in v. 21, he says people “became futile in their thinking... Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.” Chapter 1 continues, saying our hearts desire impurity, exchanging the truth of God for a lie, and we worship the creature rather than the creator. In v. 29, he just lets it fly, “They were filled with every kind of injustice, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God’s decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die, yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.” Paul is not exactly impressed with people.

But then in chapter 2, he starts talking about God and God’s mercy. How even though it was us who walked away, God doesn’t just leave us on our own, lost with no way home. God comes to us in Jesus. God meets us where we are, and makes a way home. In chapter 5, “While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly... God proves His love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.” Through His death on the cross, Jesus stood in our place. He paid for our acts of injustice, deceit, craftiness, gossip, foolishness, ruthless, rebellion – everything mentioned in chapter 1 – so we could come home to God again. God reaches out to us in mercy. Not just saying you can come home, but actively reaching out to us and showing us the way home. What incredible mercy! Once he makes it past chapter 1, Paul spends the next 10 chapters helping us see everything God has done in Jesus Christ.

Then chapter 12, our reading for today, starts out “therefore”. Therefore, because of what God has done, things can change. Things have changed. Verse 1, “Therefore, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God’s mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship.” I have always loved this verse, but have never really been able to grasp it, and I think I finally figured out why. It calls an oxymoron reasonable. It says, presenting your body as a “living sacrifice” is your “reasonable worship.” A living sacrifice is not reasonable. It makes no sense. Sacrifices are killed. That is what makes them a sacrifice. Since the 4th chapter of Genesis, people have been lifting sacrifices to God, and the sacrifices are always killed and offered to God. Presenting your body as a living sacrifice is not reasonable. It is an oxymoron. Unless, of course, what you are

presenting God is not your physical body, but rather your body of work – what you do with your physical body. In essence, lifting your body as a physical sacrifice is saying, “Here God, here is my self, my whole self. What I do, what I say, what I think, how I spend my time, how I spend my money. Here God, I give it to You. Don’t just consume it, transform it. Yes, take it, consume it, burn up all that I have made it. But return it as something new – something of You. Let me be a living sacrifice. Change it from what I have been doing with it, to what you want done with it.” This is what Romans is talking about.

Remember Paul’s picture of us, of humanity from chapter 1? We get impressed with our own thinking, we start to worship the creature rather than the creator, and are therefore filled with every kind of injustice, evil, covetousness, envy, deceit, craftiness, and gossip, acting boastful, rebellious, foolish, faithless, heartless, and ruthless. I am a big fan of psychology, therapy and counseling. But it has a tendency to worship the creature. It focuses on the person like they are the center, like they are the goal, the focus, the one who life is all about. Romans 12:1 says take that futile thinking, that arrogance that worships the creature over the creator, and place it on the altar of transformation as an act of worship.

Verse 2, “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind.” History, biology, psychology, and sociology all recognize we are shaped by our surroundings. They continue to debate how much of our personality is made up of our genetics and how much is defined by the environment around us – the nature verses nurture debate – but they all agree we are shaped and formed by our surroundings. Corporate America knows this and uses it. They spend billions of dollars to flood us with advertisements designed to keep us in line. They seek to define us as consumers, individual economic units existing to support larger markets – their market. Add to that our family and friends, organizations, and society in general and you have a whole lot of power and influence saying conform to this age. Worship the creature, yourself, over the creator. We will help shape what you think and how you feel and then encourage you to trust that what you think and feel is real and true. Greed is good. Envy is motivating. Cheating means you’re trying. Speaking your mind is an obligation. Being faithless means freedom and being ruthless is good business. Then Romans 12 tells us it doesn’t have to be that way. “Do not be conformed to this age.” Put all that on the altar. Sacrifice that to God. “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

A renewed mind doesn’t let feelings of superiority or inferiority get in the way. The first 11 chapters of Romans remind us, You and I, that we are broken, yet we are cherished. Don’t let your intellect pretend to make you too smart, too advanced, too evolved to need a Savior. Don’t pretend you are not broken. Don’t let your social media scrolling make you think you cannot compare to others and are not worthy of a Savior. Don’t pretend you are not cherished. Put that world conforming stuff on the altar for God to transform. You no longer have a mind that is conformed to this world, but a mind that is transformed by the mercy of God. A mind

that says, "God, not my will, but Yours be done." God, I submit to you. You came to me when I was lost. You paid the death sentence I had earned from all my selfishness. You made a way for me to get past myself. And it was all mercy. God, I have nothing left to do but give you myself as a living thank you note. It is the only reasonable response. I am Yours, here to do Your will. I offer myself to You.

Mike Van Heyningen