

Romans 12:1-8

GRACE SHINING THROUGH

Why do you do the things you do? What causes you to make the decisions you make? How do you decide how to respond when someone says something to you? What guides your reaction when someone does something to you? When you are choosing how to spend your time, your money, your energy, what influences and shapes those decisions? These are decisions we make every day, aren't they, and even though there are very set reasons in us for why and how we make them, they are generally so ingrained that we speak and act without really thinking about it. On a very basic level it can be about the fear of punishment or the desire for reward. It is sometimes about the relationship we have with other people involved, and whether we want to please them, we don't really care about them, or even that we want to hurt them. Various theologies, philosophies, -isms, can come into play here. We may follow a practice of achieving our own pleasure at all costs, or of rigidly following the rules which are laid down no matter what. It is a question with many and varied, both deep and shallow, answers: why do we do the things we do?

When I was very young we used to watch the music show 'Countdown' on the ABC each week (we only had two TV channels in country South Australia back then), I remember they would regularly have artists and bands on and present them with a Golden Record. Looking it up this week the practice of giving a Golden Record for achieving 500,000 sales of an album started back in the 1950s. I do remember when Molly Meldrum first started handing out Platinum Records, and for once my childhood memory is accurate and I discovered this week that they started being handed out in 1976 for sales of 1 million albums. I guess that as the population grew, and artists and bands started selling albums not just in their local area, but nationally and then internationally, a bigger award had to be made. And now, since 1999, there are Diamond Records, for those who sell over 10 million records. So, while a Gold Record was once the top award to aspire to, then along came Platinum, and then Diamond.

We can apply a similar progression to how we make our decisions, especially in relation to how we respond to and treat other people. We probably all know the Golden Rule, which is? 'Do unto others

as you would have them do unto you'. It is straight from the Bible, and said by Jesus in Matthew 7:12. And it is good, but if taken just by itself it can have limitations. For example, if I say, 'I don't care about how people treat me', or, 'I don't need anybody else, so I'm happy for us all to just look after ourselves', then it's not working in the way Jesus intended it to. To follow on from this, according to the internet at least, we have the Platinum Rule; Do unto others as they would like to have you do unto them. This takes the reason for how we speak and act away from our needs and desires, and focuses more on the other person, and that's good. But again, it can be subjective; if for whatever reason someone says, 'I don't care about others or how they treat me', or anything like that, it can allow us to speak and act towards people in a way which isn't in line with how we are called to make these decisions as Christians.

And then, to follow the progression of rewards for selling albums, and to pick up what Paul is teaching us in this reading today, we can have what I am going to call the Diamond Rule. How would you think that goes? My definition, based on both what is taught here and what is elsewhere in the Bible, is that the Diamond Rule goes something like; Do unto others as God does unto you. When we look at how we treat and respond to people, the focus then becomes much more about how God in His love acts towards us. Treat others in the way God treats you. Love as God loves you. Forgive as God forgives you. Serve as God serves you. The Diamond Rule, or, another way to say it, God's grace shining through us. Another reason I like the picture of this progression towards a diamond, is that a diamond is a stone which starts as plain old carbon, and under intense heat and pressure is transformed into something we consider to be a precious stone. And then, that stone is something which light shines through and reflects off. Sound familiar? It is God who by the power of Jesus' death on the cross has transformed us into people who are precious and loved by Him, and a part of that is that we are made and called to have God's love shining through and reflecting off us. As God's people we are called to live out the Diamond Rule, to always live in a way which has God's grace shining through.

Going to our reading here from Romans, there's three ways here we can think about how we make those decisions we make in our lives every day; how what is taught here affects why we do the things we do. The first one is about who God is to us. To this, Paul simply says, God is good. The God who made the world and still cares for it, who despite our rebellion against Him sent His Son to die and

rise again for us so our relationship with Him can be restored, and the God who through the Holy Spirit gives us this gift of faith and life, He is good. He is loving, forgiving, gracious, caring, compassionate. In thinking about our relationship with Him, and how we then respond to that, this is where we start from.

And then, we can think about what God has done for us. Once again, one short statement here sums up so much, 'God has treated me with undeserved grace' (v 3). God's grace is God's free gift of love and forgiveness. It moves beyond what we want to receive, and on to what He wants to give to us. It is *undeserved* grace, not given in either the hope of reward nor response for what has already been received. It is God coming to us first, before anything else, totally unconditionally. What God has done for us can never be either earned or repaid, but it is something we can only receive because of His love for us.

Thirdly then, and the bit Paul speaks about much more here, having God's grace shine through us is about living as who God has made us to be. We are now called to be a living sacrifice to God. We are instructed to let God change the way we think, to transform us from within, so that we don't just follow the ways of the world. To use good sense and not judge ourselves up against others but to rely on the faith God has given us. And then, a picture we know Paul likes to use, as Christians we are called to see ourselves as all being a part of the body of Jesus, with each part being as important as the others. A whole list of gifts are listed; prophesy, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, being good to others. God gifts each one of us, and calls us to serve Him in different ways, both when we are working together as part of His body, and when we are individually making decisions on how we treat people, how we speak to them, how we respond to their needs in our lives each day.

Through who God is to us, what God has done for us, and being who God has made us to be, we are called to live our lives and make our decisions in ways which allow the grace of God to be shining through us.

Having looked at this Bible teaching here as our foundation, let's go back to how we started in thinking about the basis we use for making our choices and decisions in life; how do we then apply the Diamond Rule into this? I am sure that we would all say that knowing God's love and wanting to respond to it plays a large part in deciding how we treat people, respond to needs, live as part of society and our

world. But I am sure also that we all acknowledge that even though having the intention to reflect God's grace lies at the heart of these decisions, because of the human failings inside of us, the pressures and temptations of the world around us, and the devil working hard to keep us away from following God, having God's love shine through us like a true and pure diamond isn't always what we end up doing. So, think about what we have looked at here in Romans 12, and this statement, 'Do unto others as God does unto you'. As do you that, consider: is there a relationship in my life in which I could be more reflective of God's love in how I treat someone? Is there an opportunity I could follow or take up to serve others that I currently see as too uncomfortable or inconvenient? Do I live as a living sacrifice to God, placing Him first in everything, having Him as both the foundation and centre of my life, or do I worship Him with only some parts of my life and prefer to keep Him out of others? Do I use the gifts I have been given to worship God and serve others? Are my decisions and actions based on what I believe God is calling me to think and do, or are the attractions of what the world thinks sometimes too hard to pass up? Am I willing to allow God to put me through the process of becoming a diamond, so that His grace can truly reflect in and through me in my life?

God is good. And He has called and equipped us to live our lives as living sacrifices to Him, so that in all our thoughts, in our decisions and actions, we show His love and grace both to those who are in His body and those who don't know Him. As we allow His love and grace to transform us to be like precious stones to Him, may we also become those through whom His grace is now shining through. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Have another read through this Bible reading, Romans 12:1-8. Is there anything in particular which stands out to you there?
- Think about the Diamond Rule: Do unto others as God does unto you. If you apply this to all areas and relationships in your life, would what change? What different decisions would you make? Who would you treat differently?
- What gifts and abilities has God given you in your life? Are there some you aren't using as much as you could be? What opportunities are in your life in which you could be using these gifts more?

Pray: thank God that we receive and know His love and grace in our lives. Pray that in all our decisions, and in our thoughts, words, and actions, we will allow His grace to shine in and through us.

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