

From Selfies to Selfless-Radical Renewal
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Romans 12:1-8

We're in the book of **Romans**, and we come to the hinge text. I'm just going to warn you right now if you want to put up your shield so that the Spirit of God has to work extra hard to get to your heart, now's the time to do it because we come to a pivot. And the thing about the pivot is that we are going to be challenged in this text to move from our addiction to selfies to living a life that is selfless. What does it mean to live Christianly in the world?

I'm going to read, as Troy already did, **Romans 11:33**, and I'm only going to read down through **Romans 12:2** and try to lay the background.

Romans 11:33-12:2

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?”

³⁵ “Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?”

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him
are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Romans 12:1

I appeal to you therefore ... Amen

... circle that word, draw an arrow upward from that. One of the great hinge words of all the Scripture, I appeal to you “therefore” ...

Romans 12:1b-2

^{1b}... brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 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.

It's been two weeks since we were in that text, but when you've slowed down enough to contemplate the incomparable attributes of God. When you think on the depths of His riches and His wisdom and His knowledge, His unsearchable judgements, His inscrutable ways, when you adjust your thinking to realize that no one, not even you, can know the depths of His mind or can bring counsel to Him that He has not considered.

Repeatedly this past week it seemed like Linda's and my dialogue, one or the other of us would say, "Now here's something I'm not sure God's aware of." And believe me, we've tried to give Him some advice.

Or that you would somehow be able to give Him or something that you have or something that you have done would somehow obligate Him to repay you. Or come to grips that all things related to creation and all things related to your salvation, all those things come from Him, they originate with Him. He is sovereign over that. They come through Him. He is sovereign over that. They are designed to Him. He is sovereign over that. And that when it all comes down to it, only He deserves the glory ... the glory. This is a pivot text. The summary point is this, the doctrines of grace flow from lives of gratitude.

So now in **Romans 12** he's going to move from exposition to ethics. He's going to talk about from our doctrine comes our duty or from our believing comes our behaving. Our exposition has to lead to exhortation, or his explanations of these rich eleven chapter truths of Gospel, they must find application in the way we live our lives.

Now that's all by way of introduction.

Not highly recommended for men of God tasked with biblical proclamation on Sundays, but with the family in town for such a short period of time, it just seemed to make sense. Truth is that last Saturday night ten adults from my family sat together for nearly two hours, stressing out over the fate and welfare of a crudely made toy. The not-so-subtle storyline was a masterpiece profile of contemporary culture. Our hero wanted something so badly he was willing to take incredible risks to attain his goal. And at each challenging turn a guide came alongside to instruct and encourage him in his pursuit, urging him not to give up but to press through. And his faithful sidekick, when lost or confused, would punch the button and pause to listen to his "inner voice." In classic story structure, about three-fourths

of the way through the drama, the dreaded antagonists executed the necessary “rescue of the stranded cat” routine, and suddenly you are wondering if you have misunderstood them all along.

And then, just as the story ramps up to the predictable made-for-movies climax, they hit you with a surprise resolution. Spoiler alert for those who haven’t been there with your family yet: Woody has spent his lifetime caring for others by seeing to their needs and serving for their happiness. But suddenly Buzz Light-Year’s inner voice says that Woody has lived his life for others long enough, and now it is time that he thinks only of himself and his own happiness. Just do what your heart tells you to do and let others take care of themselves is the counsel that he receives. And as we exit this insanity, sometime after nine o’clock last Saturday night, Nana Linda is heard to say to my grandchildren, “Good grief! Here we are a bunch of adults watching a movie about a plastic fork with pipe-cleaner arms. We have totally lost our minds!”

I have to be honest. Linda may have dozed off a time or two in the attempt to rescue the forgotten plastic fork, but I was overwhelmed as I began to realize the story that was being told. It is a summation of our culture, and Paul is calling us to live counter-culturally. That’s where the title, “From Selfies to Selfless”.

He begins by saying, “I appeal to you therefore,” in light this great Gospel Truth that the heathen are rightly condemned. We don’t argue with that, **Romans 1**. And that the hypocrite, the one that says, “That’s true,” but does it anyway is rightly condemned. We don’t pause much over that.

But then when the Hebrew, the law-abiding, who seemed to be more spiritual than others, also fall under God’s judgmental condemnation, suddenly we start to squirm and get a little uncomfortable. And when he declares that, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” that, “there is none righteous, not even one,” or as he summarizes it with his propositional statement here in ...

Romans 11:32

For God has consigned all to disobedience.

He’s put all in an inescapable dungeon so that He might have mercy on them all. In light of all of that the Apostle Paul said, “So what are we supposed to do with that?” He raises the “so-what question.” So he says ...

Romans 12:1

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God ...

... therefore, I appeal to you, because of what God has mercifully done for us, I make this appeal to you. He's talked about the mercies of. God declares His sovereignty over salvation:

Romans 9:15

I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

He says in ...

Romans 9:16

So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

He says ...

Romans 9:23

... in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy

Romans 11:30-31

³⁰ For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy.

Romans 11:32

For God has consigned all to disobedience, that He may have mercy on all!

Or as Paul would say in his letter to Titus ...

Titus 3:5

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Paul begins by saying, "I appeal to you, I urge you, I beseech you." He doesn't make a commandment. It doesn't become legalistic. He's saying, "What is the right thing to do in light of what God has done for you? I

appeal to you by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice.”

We said before that when he talks about the mercy of God, he is talking about a God Who does not give us what we deserve. That’s why we say we’re glad that He is not a god of justice because were He just in all things, then justice would say we are all condemned, rightly, and we are eternally separated from Him. So, He does not give us what we deserve. That’s mercy.

He does give to us what we do not deserve. That is grace. The two sides of the same coin. So, if we summarize the first eleven chapters, when we come to this hinge in the test, this great pivot point, we have found that His mercies cover all of our sins. He has forgiven us all our transgressions. Both the incidental unaware ones as well as those willful acts of rebellion against Him. In His amazing grace He has, as He says in ...

Isaiah 1:18

... though your sins are like scarlet,
(He will make them as) ... wool.
though they are red like crimson
... they will be (like snow).

He just, like, totally wipes them out as though they never existed. That’s the mercy of God ... that’s the mercy of God.

In the early days when you’re freshly born again, the Adversary wants to continue to take you back to what a loser you were and continue to remind you of how unworthy you are of the grace that has been poured out in your direction. And then you’re reminded that His mercy did not give me what I deserve. He’s forgiven my sins.

And then He’s adopted us into His family. Like I said when Dawn Marie was at M.D. Anderson in cancer treatment, when they were checking in, the lady asked about their children, and they said, “Well, we have two adopted children, and we have a miracle baby of our own.”

And she said, “I, too, am adopted, and I always told my brother who was born into the family that Mom and Dad chose me, they wanted me, they just got stuck with you.”

The point of God's adoption is that of all the people in the world that He could add to His household that would make Him look better, why in the world would He choose me? Why would choose you? That's the mercies of God, that He would take that which could in no way enhance His glory, and He would add us to the family. He's also promised us that this loving relationship with Him was secure forever. What can separate us from the love of God? His mercy promises that even though we stumble and fail, though we are found to be faithless, yet God is continually found to be faithful. His mercy guarantees that that which He has begun in us, He will complete.

But it also adds the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. We spent a long time in **Romans 8**, that God would choose to move in to us and make us His resident. He says that in **1 Corinthians 6**, don't you know that your body is a temple of God in the Spirit, that God moves in.

I had a long dialogue with a brother this week over does God ever move into a residence and not renovate it, remodel it, clean it up? And the answer that I'd say is, "No." He moves in exactly the way we are, but as soon as He moves in, He starts to do a renovation work within us. His mercies allow Him to place His Holy Spirit in us.

So he says, "I appeal to you therefore, because of all of those mercies that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice." Present your body, when you think in terms of sacrifice, your mind goes back immediately. If you're one of the Hebrews hearing this read in the Roman church that you think immediately in **Leviticus** and how when they had sinned they would bring a bull, an animal, and they would lay their hands on it. They would confess their sins, and then they would slit the throat of the animal, and they would take the blood, and they would apply the blood. And they would take the carcass of that, and they would lay it on the altar. When he says, "I urge that you present your bodies as a sacrifice," the first thing we think is that this is a one-and-done, and that's exactly what we ought to think. "I urge you in light of what God in His mercy has done for you, take all that you are and once and for all put it before Him on the altar."

But the spin here is that suddenly we are not a dead sacrifice, we give Him our body, but we are a living sacrifice. He says in ...

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but

Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

We give ourselves once and for all to Him, but we do so, so that we might live continually for Him. And so the challenge is that he uses the Old Testament picture on sacrifice, and he describes it as being that which is holy and acceptable which is your spiritual worship.

Holy simply means to be totally set apart for sacred use. When you come before God and you realize what in His mercy He has done for you that you say to Him, “I want to give you my body.”

That was kind of an affront to the Greeks among them in that they felt like the body was a prison from which the soul longed to escape. The fact that God could take our bodies and could use it for His glory was a new thought. And that’s basically what he is saying, “I want you to take your life. You are to love the Lord your God with all your mind, all your heart, all your soul, all your strength.” When he says, “I want you to present your body,” is simply, “I want to take your life and offer it to God for His purposes,” twenty-four-seven, three sixty-five, whatever you do with this life He has given you, as you continue to live, you’re no longer living for yourself, but you’re now living for Him. That’s the difference.

There is a worldview shift that has to take place. When you pause to understand the glory of God and the incredible gift of His mercy, you have to begin to realize that suddenly life is no longer evolving around me. I’m no longer the measure of all things. All things do not exist for my comfort, my purposes, my pleasure, my glory. Why do I go on living? I go on living not for me but for Him.

I give myself as a holy offering, set apart and acceptable. God has certain standards, and the point is that I can bring nothing to Him that does not measure up to His standards. We all know when we read the first three chapters of **Romans** that we don’t measure up, and so he says how is it acceptable to Him? It is on the basis of what He by His grace has done for us. So, it begins by coming to Him and acknowledging that we desperately need a savior and that there is nothing that we can do nor ever been able to do that could retire the incredible, unpayable debt of our sin against Him. But by faith we trust that He has paid the penalty in full. Suddenly by His grace we’re forgiven, we’re transformed. We become an acceptable offering.

Then he goes on to say, “Which is your spiritual worship.” Literally “worship” is not what starts and ends on Sunday morning, but it is the life that is devoted totally to God’s glory wherever it is at any time whatever it does, and that is the logical, reasonable thing. That is the proper response. “What shall I do with this life that He has rescued and redeemed? I was destroying it, and He saved it. Now, what should I do with this life that He has saved, and that is, I should use it for His glory.” To worship means to display and to declare His worthiness. And so we do that. Present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

Then he goes on to say, “How do I do that? If I once and for all put my life on the altar and give it to God not to take it back again, how do I practically do that?” And so he describes that in the second verse. He describes it first of all in the negative and then in the positive. “Do not be conformed to this world.” Here the first one is that it’s a one-and-done kind of thing. Give yourself as a sacrifice. Now here it is progressive and continual, that is, it is a daily decision. “I will not be conformed to the world.” To be conformed to the world is to constantly be fighting its perennial and continual pressure.

You see the world’s system, the world’s scheme, the world’s plan for things is that all of us would live our lives like Woody was encouraged to do, that we would all live for ourselves, for our advancement, for our reputation, for our accumulation, for our promotion. In the business world and in the family world and in the friendship world, we would always be thinking first and foremost of us, that we would continually use our social media to describe what a wonderful, perfect life we have and how our children are never disobedient and they’re never dirty, and they’re never disapproved of, and that we are always succeeding at everything that we try to do. That’s the world’s system, that we would live every day, all the time for us and what we could gain from it.

And he says, “don’t let the world conform you. He says this in ...

1 Peter 1:14

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the
passions of your former ignorance, but as He who called
you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct

The world around us tells us that it’s OK to compromise if it satisfies or brings pleasure to you. If it advances your goals and your agenda, then whatever corners you have to cut or what ever injury you have to inflict

upon others, it doesn't matter because it's all about you. And he says, "As obedient children, don't be conformed, don't succumb to the molding and the shaping pressure of the culture and the world around you.

He describes what that is in ...

1 John 2:15-16

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world ... ¹⁶ For all that is in the world (and now he describes it) — the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life — (the arrogant, self-centeredness of life that) is not from the Father but from the world.

So the first thing, if you want to live Christianly in light of what God has by His mercy done in rescuing you, setting you free from this dungeon from which there was no escape, what do you give Him in response? You give Him your life. How do you do that? Every day you push back against the pressure of the culture and the world to do it their way. You begin to think in terms of others rather than in terms of yourself. Over the next chapters, **Romans 12, 13, 14, 15** it's going to go into great detail, practical detail, on how it is that we live counter-culturally, how we live as believers in a fallen, corrupt world, how we do that for God's glory. That's the negative.

The positive is, "But be transformed by the renewal of your mind." To be "transformed" it is the word metamorphosis. It's that picture of a caterpillar that through a process of time becomes a butterfly. The butterflies have begun their invasion in Lincoln, again. I stood in my back yard and took pictures of them as they fluttered in and out, and you say, "But they didn't start that way." He is saying, "You didn't start that way." The renewal of the mind is a process of allowing the Spirit of God to give you a new perspective.

Take your Bible, go back to **Romans 1**. Weeks and weeks ago we were here. When God says of those who have known of His existence and His attributes, and yet they have exchanged the worship of the Creator, and they worship instead the creation. They continue to spiral down in their rebellion and in their sin, and God says in ...

Romans 1:24

Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves ...

Romans 1:26

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions.

Romans 1:28

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

What he said is that in your rebellion against God, your mind ceased to function the way it was created to function. When God in His mercy rescues you from that He begins a transformation of your mind, a renewal of your mind in order that you might understand His will and His purposes.

You say I still flash back, and I still think the old thoughts. My value system is always in process, but too many times I fall back to the things I treasured before I knew Jesus even though I'm rejoicing in the fact that He loved me when I was unlovable, I still find that I think the way the people around me think. I'm still challenged by the success stories that they tell. My mind is still not what a redeemed mind ought to be.

So, he asks the question, "How is it that I renew my mind?" Just a few suggestions, and we'll unpack these as we go through the following chapters.

Number one, it has to begin with the miracle of new birth. Until you've come to the end of yourself and come by faith to Jesus, your mind will never be able to properly assess the things that are of true value. You'll always think worldly. You'll always treasure things in a worldly way. You must begin with the miracle of new birth.

The second is you must participate in corporate worship. The reason that we gather regularly, he says in **Hebrews 10** is that there are some who are wandering away from the faith. There are some times when you're out in the pressure of the world, the culture is constantly challenging you, and you start to feel like Elijah, and you say, "I alone am the only one who has not yet bowed the knee to Baal," and then you gather together in an assembly like this, and Pastor Troy or one of the other worship leaders leads us through the hymns of the faith, the songs of the faith, and by the third song, you're beginning to see repeated themes and phrases. Your heart is encouraged to realize that truth continues to be truth.

In the corporate gathering you also begin to hear those who are singing and worshipping around you, and your heart is encouraged to realize, "I'm not alone. I'm not the only one. I can press on." You will not renew your mind

when you isolate yourself from the fellowship of the brothers and the sisters.

But you also need a continual immersion into God's Word. The only way to transform your thinking is to begin to be exposed continually to the thoughts of God, and the only way to be exposed to the thoughts of God is by immersing yourself in His Word. I had coffee with Arnie Cole from the Center for Biblical Engagement again this week. I said tell me that principle, again. What is it that it takes to transform a life?

It's engagement with the Word. And he said, "Engagement is not simply reading three or four verses and putting your Bible up and going to work. Biblical engagement is a minimum of four times a week where you read a text, and you wrestle with what it means, and you walk away understanding what it is you are to be in light of what it says." Biblical engagement is the only way to renew your mind is to intentionally and consistently immerse your thinking in the truths of the Scripture.

A fourth way is to be constantly submitting yourself to the voice of the Spirit. **Galatians 5** tells us what we look like when we listen to our own spirit, to our own voice. The fruit of the flesh is, and it's ugly. Probably looks a lot like the Fourth of July gathering with you family that were always going to be a few fruit of the flesh show up at that, but the Fruit of the Spirit is the evidence that you are leaning continually upon the Spirit of God. It's the fruit of love and joy and peace and patience. You must constantly, however, choose to submit to His voice.

And then, last of all, because you have taken your life and said, "From this point on whatever I am, wherever I go, whatever I do, it is for God's glory and not for my own." It is a whole new worldview. "Things do not revolve around me. I'm not the center of the universe, God is. And by His grace and through His mercy, He has allowed me to go on living. But every breath that I breathe and every decision that I make, I want that to be so that God is more famous, and I am last."

It's the John the Baptist idea that He must increase, and I must decrease. You will not renew you mind as long as you're thinking about self-promotion and self-recognition and self-accumulation. You will only renew the mind when you think in terms of this life that He has given me today. It belongs to Him. Belonging to Him that He will use it for His glory.

Notice he says that you need to be resisting the conforming pressure of the world and intentionally transforming, regularly renewing you mind so that by testing you may discern what the will of God is. By testing, that means by life experience, by trial and error. What is it that God wants for me? The will of God, he's going to describe it for us in **Romans 12, 13, 14, and 15**. But he says it's the process of saying, "No," to the pressure of the world and, "Yes," to the renewing work of the Word in our lives. And when you do that, over time, you will test, you will prove the quality, the acceptability of this whole new life which is the life of sacrifice before the Lord.

He summarizes it by saying it is that which is good, acceptable, and perfect. "Good," that is the word for its moral quality or its worth. "What is it about my life that declares a worthiness of God's loving character for me?" He talks about that in **Ephesians 4**, that we should walk in a manner worthy of the Gospel. That's what he's talking about, that which is good, that which is acceptable or worthy of God's goodness. It's a moral quality.

That which is "acceptable" means that it passes the test. You remember when they started with the Passover Lamb. They were to select a lamb, and they were to set it aside, and they were to study it for its perfection. If there were any blemishes or flaws, it was to be removed, and they would put another in its place.

So, what God deserves from us, what God finds acceptable from us is that we give Him our life so that as He works in us, we become more and more acceptable. We pass the test of unblemished living.

Last of all, "that which is perfect," which is literally, "that which is complete or full." On the basis of what God has done by His saving mercy, that He had imprisoned us in an inescapable dungeon, but He showed up with the key in His hand, and by His grace He set us free.

In light of this new freedom that we have, what should we do? We should give Him all that we are, give Him our lives. And in the process of doing that, recognize that the pressure is going to be great to be what we were before, but by His grace He will give us the ability to say, "No," to the values and the goals and the direction and the treasures of the world. Instead that we would embrace it from God's perspective.

So just let me summarize it in this way. How then should we live Christianly in this world? Number one, constantly remind yourself of His mercies. The greatest hindrance to a life of gratitude is forgetfulness. It's good periodically to be reminded of where you were and what you were. Not so that it drags you back and discourages you, but so that it elevates your great gratitude toward the mercy of God in your life.

The hardest part about going out west for my brother's funeral and other exposures, I come into contact with people who knew me ... when. The amazing about growing up in small-town Nebraska is God may forgive, but the neighbors never do. Whenever you go back, you're reminded of the mercies of God. Such I was, but by His grace, this is what I am.

Secondly, we need to stay alert to the relentless pressure to conform. You cannot drop your guard. The world has a set of values. They declare that a life of meaning must establish certain goals. The world says that we must be committed to self-advancement. We must always ask ourselves, "What's in it for me?" The world tells you that you should seek power and position and increased possessions. The world says that you should live your life to get ahead of the other guy. You should always be grabbing what is mine before another one gets it like a two-year-old in the pre-school. We should be hanging on to what's mine no matter who is hurt or who is pained by it. So, always living your life to get your needs met.

Regrettably, many of us choose our church worship participation on the basis of what's in it for me. "I went to church that morning, and I didn't find anything in it for me. I'm going to change churches because the church I've been going to hasn't been meeting my needs." That's the values of the world. We have to continually press back against that, that we are not the center of the universe. It is not about our comfort or our glory. It's all about Him.

Third, we have to choose that in every action, "I will choose to bring Him glory." Whatever I do, and some of you are struggling, I know, with jobs that are less than satisfying and responsibilities that are overwhelming, and some of you are just languishing away in a world where you're unseen, and you say, "What is my life about? What is the purpose?" And the purpose is that you gave your life to the One Who rescued your life from sin, and having done that, you just simply take today and say, "Whatever it is that's

on the plate today, I will do this for Your glory. I will do it all so that Your name is enhanced.”

The summary of these verses is, number one, give God all that you are. It's a one-and-done. In light of what He has done, the only logical thing to do is say, “If you would love me enough to die in my place and to set me free and pay off the debt I could not pay, then, God, I owe You all that I am.”

Number two, commit yourself to being a non-conformist. Every day say, “I will live Christianly in an anti-Christian culture. I will live a godly life in a godless world.”

Number three, commit to renewing your mind continually. Develop a pattern, a habit of imbibing God's Word, of consistent fellowship with other believers so that in the context of the Word and fellowship you're continually thinking differently. The old things are passed away, and suddenly new things have come.

Father, I am just blown away by Your amazing grace that in Your kindness and in Your wisdom that You would choose to love us. Something about us wants to accept the gift of deliverance from that dungeon that was inescapable, but we want to maintain control of what's left of our lives. But as Paul says, the only logical thing for those who have been forgiven to do is give themselves fully and completely to the One that rescued them.

So we're asking that You would give us the courage to make that commitment, that we would lay our lives before You as a gift, never to take it back again and that we would have the alertness and the awareness to continually fight against the pressure of the culture around us, and do so by the faithful renewing of the way we think and that we would do it all, not for our reputation but for your glory alone, we pray.