

Re-set: Changed by the Mercy of God

Romans 12:1-2

When I first started using a “smart phone”



, I had a day in which my phone wasn't working right. My email wasn't downloading. I couldn't get my old BoxOffice app to give me information, etc. So, I called my son, Brandon - whom I was quite certain would know more about this sort of thing than I did - and asked him what I should do. He said, “You probably don't need a new phone or even to take yours to an Apple repair store. Before doing anything drastic, just try re-starting it. iPhones sometimes seem to like to be re-set.” So, I did. And, at least on that occasion, it worked. The emails flooded in again. Everything was re-set and re-synced.

That day came into my mind as I began praying about what God would have happen in our lives individually as well as in our church family. Let me tell you why. Over my many years of walking with Jesus, I have learned that there are times when I too need a re-set in my spiritual life. It's not like I need to start all over. It's more like things have gotten out of sync.

In those times, which often require some silence and alone-time with the Lord, I discover so many things, e.g., the need to get rid of clutter in my life, to reorient my life around biblical priorities, to make things right with others, etc. When I take the time to stop and allow the Lord to realign my life, I find my strength renewed and my joy restored. I imagine we all could use a re-set in our journeys with Jesus. Just as much, I believe that the time is at hand that we could use a re-set as a church family.

Romans 12-13 is a Bible passage that can help us. After writing eleven chapters of sound theology speaking of God's gospel that offers salvation to all who place faith in Jesus, the Apostle Paul turns in Chapter 12 from explaining the gospel to telling us how to live our daily lives in

response to it. In his opening words to this section of his letter (12:1a), he tells us the life God wants us to live after we trust Jesus is to be lived “in view of God’s mercy.” That’s the “re-set” phrase I want you to take home today: *Live in view of God’s mercy.*

It’s clear to me that this phrase is foundational for every part of our lives as followers of Jesus. That phrase points us back to and summarizes everything that the Apostle Paul has said about the gospel of Jesus Christ - and it points us forward to all the ways that the Apostle Paul wrote about how experiencing God’s mercy changes our daily lives in practical ways. The **foundation for re-setting our lives** is this: Our Christian faith, different from other religions, is not one of earning the favor and love of God but of responding to the mercy and love God offers us in Jesus.

Looking back at Romans 1-11: A Description and Declaration of God’s Mercy

I find the book of Romans to be not only deeply theological but also deeply pastoral. The Apostle Paul seemed to understand well the minds and hearts of people who would have heard this letter being read in the house churches meetings so long ago in Rome. Regarding this matter of God’s mercy, it seems to me that he makes several points to them in Romans 1-11 that are as important now as they were then:

1. *Some think they do not need God’s mercy* (Rom 1:1-3:20) - *There is no one righteous - not even one!*

Romans begins with Paul saying, “God has good news for you. The good news (1:16) is that everyone who believes in Jesus will be made right with God even though we have all lived lives filled with what is not right. And, when we are made right with God through faith in Jesus, we will begin to live a life that is right with God - “those who are right with God will live by faith” (1:18), i. e., genuine faith in Jesus will lead to us living righteous lives. Salvation from our sin is a gift of mercy received by faith - not something we can earn.

But, there were people - mostly non-Israelites or “Gentiles” -- sitting in the churches who felt they didn’t need mercy. They felt that they had never before had God’s Word, and the laws and commands found in it, so they could not be held accountable to live right before God. **See 2:12-16.** But, to them the Bible says, “*God has written right and wrong in people’s*

hearts (2:15).” It shows up in the consciences that all human beings have. Even though people may not have God’s written laws in writing, all people know a lot about right and wrong - and all people do what is wrong anyway.” So, the Bible teaches that all people have done wrong. All people need forgiveness. All people need to be shown mercy if we will ever have any hope.

But, there were others in the churches, mostly Paul’s Jewish relatives, who felt that God had chosen them personally to be his people and that, because of that privilege, they were fine as they were and did not need mercy. “So,” they said, “we’re not like those people out there in the world. We may not be perfect but we don’t do the kinds of awful things the rest of the world is doing!”

When I read what Paul says to them in **2:17-3:8**, I find it strikes home to many people, like me, who have grown up in the church and therefore tend to think that others in the world simply have to be worse than we are. Can you relate to that? To his Jewish relatives, and to many of us as well, Paul says, “The fact that you have heard God’s Word is evidence that you know right from wrong. But, when you continue to do the very things you teach against in church, you show you need mercy as much as the rest of the world.” He sums all this up in **3:10-20** in which Paul declares, “*There is no one righteous - not even one!*” All people need God’s mercy.

2. *Some think they are beyond the reach of God’s mercy (Rom 7) - God’s law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do (7:14-15).*

Paul tells about his own struggle with feeling trapped by his own sinfulness in Rom 7 giving testimony to what so many in church feel deeply, i.e., that even after we have placed our faith in Jesus, we continue to fall short of living as God would have us live. Can you relate to his words in 7:14-15? The great Apostle Paul genuinely felt, when he wrote this, that his slavery to sin seemed to be at times more powerful than God’s ability to set him free. He was so overwhelmed by his own failure that he felt that the seriousness of his sin had put him beyond the reach of God’s mercy. He expressed this agonizingly in **7:24**, “*What a wretched man I am! Who will - who can - rescue me?*” Do you think this is true of many who show up in church in our own day? Indeed, have you ever wrestled with the fact that there are things in your life that have a grip on your life?

If that is true with you, then today, you need to remember what Paul remembered in **7:25**. He shouts out the good news of God, “That’ s be to God! He is the one who delivers me though our Lord Jesus Christ!”

No one is beyond the reach of the mercy of God offered through Jesus.

3. *God’ s mercy is needed by all and is sufficient for all (Rom 3:21–6:23; 8:1–39). There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

From the hopelessness of hearing that there is no one right with God, the Bible breaks forth with a statement that many people feel expresses the heart of the gospel more succinctly than any other. It’ s in **3:21–25a**:

*But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known... This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Are you in that “all” ?), and **all** are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Are you in that “all? Have you placed your faith in Jesus?). God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.*

This was a costly mercy, requiring the blood of Jesus. **That’ s what God has done.** Do you think you need it?

And, **there is also a promise!** To those who, like Paul, wondered whether the mercy of God was sufficient to forgive and save them because their sins were so serious and deep-rooted, the Bible makes a promise in Romans 8. After teaching about God’ s wonderful promise to all who trust Jesus promise, Paul adds 3 chapters, Romans 9–11, to assure his own Jewish people that God keeps his promises. What is that promise?

God promises that when you place your faith in Jesus, you will no longer face any condemnation (**8:1**). Your sins are gone. And, when you place your faith in Jesus, you receive God’ s Holy Spirit who will work in you until you no longer will continue to sin because, using Paul’ s words, God will re-make you until you are “conformed to the image of his Son, i. e., Jesus Christ (**8:29**). And, until God finishes his work in you, He promises that nothing in all creation will be able to separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (**8:39**)!

This is all a gift of God's mercy. Therefore!! - "in view of God's mercy..." , live your life.

Looking Forward to Romans 12-16 - A Life Lived in View of God's Mercy

Our changed lives as Christians flow out of the mercy of God. We live in response to what God has done. That's what's different about Christian commitment. We're not motivated by pride, fear, habit, self-interest, not even primarily by duty. We're motivated primarily by gratitude for the mercy and love of God.

So, the more you are thrilled by God's mercy to you, the more you will be ready to live your life in ways that please him. "Live in view of God's mercy", says Paul.

The two ways he specifically says we should do this are these 1) offer your body and 2) offer your mind:

Offer your body to God (12:1b). *In view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice...*

I'm sure you don't think that Paul is suggesting that we should offer our physical limbs to God instead of our minds or our affections or any other part of our human make-up. The New Testament constantly calls us to give every part of our lives to God. And yet, Paul chooses to use the word "body" right here when he could have easily written, "Present yourselves to God," or "present your lives to God." Why?

What the Bible is teaching is that what you and I do with these physical bodies is a big part of our commitment to God. This has many implications for us as followers of Jesus. By saying "in view of God's mercy, offer your body to God", the Bible is saying you should make commitments like these:

- Wherever you want me to go with this body, I'll go.
- Whatever you want me to do with this body, Lord, I'll do.
- Whatever you want me to put into this body, I'll put into it.

This, he says, is what true worship is all about, i.e., a life lived with God at the center. It means that every part of our lives must be committed to God -- our sexual habits, our eating habits, our exercise patterns, etc. Paul calls this "a living sacrifice". The Jewish people

had always taken animals to the altar to be sacrificed. Now, that Christ has paid the sacrifice for our sins, we bring our lives to God to be lived for him.

So, let me ask you: Are some things that you've been doing with your body that you should surrender to him? Let me remind you that using your body as the God loves you wants you to do it will not ruin your life. It will lead you to real life.

Offer your mind to God (12:2). *In view of God's mercy..., be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

In 12:2, two key words are put in contrast to one another: conform and transform. The word "conform" meant "to take the external shape of." There is always a danger that even committed Christians might slip into taking the shape of the world, of thinking like our fallen world without God thinks. Let's face it: much of our behavior is learned behavior. We learn to behave from our parents and our peer groups. We learn it through the media and the social media. Unfortunately, much of the culture that shapes us is godless. It's materialistic, it's self-centered, it's amoral, it's often immoral. All this is what the New Testament often calls "the world." And the NT consistently warns us as Christians to beware of being like the world. Paul says, "Don't let it happen!"

What can rescue us from conformity to the world? The Bible says that the key to our lives being God-directed rather than self-directed or world-directed is "*being transformed by the renewal of your mind.*" The word "transform" is the word from which our word metamorphosis is derived. Like the word conform, transform also means to change shape. But, the word "conform" usually means to take the external form of something else, like ice being shaped by an ice cube tray. But, "transform means to change from the inside out.

The key to transformation begins in our minds. We will be applying this to our lives throughout this series we're calling "Re-set". So, in this first message, let me summarize **three elements of mind renewal:**

1. **Faith in Jesus** - Our salvation begins with our minds - and from there flows into the entirety of our lives. Do you remember Pastor Tim Peck's message last fall about "sola fide", faith alone? He said saving faith includes 1) knowledge, 2) assent and 3) trust. With our minds, we first must hear and understanding the truth about Jesus. Then with

our minds, we must believe that it is true. And then, with our minds we decide to trust Jesus and follow him. Have you placed your faith in Jesus in this way?

2. **Setting your mind on the things of God** - In **Rom 8:5**, the Bible says, *“Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.”* The point here is that when you dream about what you want to do or to become, you start by setting your mind intentionally on what you believe would be honoring to God - not just on the things our world advocates.
3. **Filling your mind with things pleasing to God** - The key verse about this is probably **Phil 4:8** — *Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.* What does this say to us? It tells us we must be careful about what we put into our minds. We’re not going to discern God’s will if our minds are being filled with trash. What am I talking about? You can apply it to your own life better than I can. You know what’s been going on in your mind and I certainly don’t. This text has an undeniable message, however, to us all about examining the books we read, the websites we go to, the movies we watch, the things we daydream about.

The secret of living distinctively as Christians is to begin thinking differently.

The point of all this is that, when we have our hearts captured by an experience of God’s mercy, we surrender our bodies and minds as a response of gratitude to God. The beginning step to resetting our lives so that our lives are God-directed rather than world-directed is to have a fresh view of the mercy of God.

Why? *Our Christian faith, different from other religions, is not one of earning the favor and love of God but of responding to the mercy and love God offers us in Jesus.*

So, let’s do so by coming together to the communion table today, a table that is a powerful reminder to us of the cost of God’s mercy, the reality of God’s mercy and the sufficiency of God’s mercy...

