

Romans 12:1-2
(Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 5:13-16)
“A Call to Transformed Living”

Introduction

You and I are on a journey, whether or not we choose to be, and we will either be carried along by the currents of our culture, our old habits and routines, or we will intentionally chart a new course, toward becoming the people that we have always known deep inside that we long to be, because we know that we were created to be so much more than we have yet become.

As we approach the end of another calendar year, it is right and good that we ask ourselves why we settle for so much less. Why are we, who believe that God has offered us so much in Christ, still willing year after year to settle for so little? Is it not because we also want many other things that we suspect may be incompatible with the claims of Christ? Or is it, perhaps, because we have tried the path of transformation before, only to be disappointed at our lack of progress?

Everything in our culture, particularly the messages presented so seductively in the various media through which our senses swim each day, conspires to tell us that we can have what we want with little time and effort, if only we are willing to pay with cash or credit card. Yet we know, in our more reflective moments, that nothing of value comes easily or cheaply. Even grace, which is by definition free, is anything but cheap.

But how, in Jeremiah’s words, are we to experience this new covenant written on our hearts? How, in Jesus’ words, do we let our light shine so that God gets glory through us? No one can do this for us. God, in his mercy, has done for us what we could not do for ourselves and has given us the means necessary to do the rest. But we must take what he has given and launch out into the adventure of a transformed life.

The question is whether or not we will respond to the divine invitation, and begin to pursue those means of grace God has graciously given in an intentional, consistent way, not as ends in themselves, not as religious performance, not as what we must do to earn God’s grace, but rather as the spiritual food and drink that make us strong.

God invites us this morning to begin again, to give ourselves intentionally to the transformation of life that the gospel aims to work within us, and through us for the sake of others. Paul will call us, throughout the rest of this letter, to a series of transformed relationships that will make us salt and light and give those around us a reason to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Body

1. The Christian life depends entirely upon God's mercies in Christ.

Paul begins this new section by reminding us that new beginnings are only possible because of God's mercy toward us. God alone can forgive our sins and heal our brokenness, guilt and shame. He alone can empower us to think and live differently than we ever have before. But he has appointed certain means by which we experience his transforming presence and power. If we do not avail ourselves of his grace, we will once again be disappointed in our hopes. Here is the point where we are challenged to turn and swim against the cultural stream. Paul calls us in these opening two verses to three acts of consecration, three acts that concern our entire being.

2. The Christian life calls for a sacrificed body.

Most religions and philosophies teach that the body is evil, that it is a hindrance to knowing God, to knowing truth and living righteously. But the Bible teaches that the body is the very vehicle of our spiritual growth, if only we will give it the Lord who created it, and ask him to make it his temple. This is what God desires: people who are willing to give him human flesh through which he lives in the world, so that his kingdom increasingly comes and his will is increasingly done on earth as in heaven. This is supremely demonstrated in worship. Paul says that this offering of our *bodies* is in fact our *spiritual* act of worship.

Dallas Willard has made this point very powerfully in his book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, where he reminds us that in order to save us, God's Son took on the flesh of a human body, ministered through the means of that body, offered his body on the cross as a sacrifice for our sin, and God raised up that body in victory over sin and death. The Son of God has linked himself to us for all eternity, as he resumed his place at the Father's right hand in glorified human flesh. He has demonstrated the dignity and honor for which the body was created and is being redeemed. And God wants his people to give back to him what he created for his glory and for our good.

How do we experience this? Let me ask a question: Where are you least inclined to give God Lordship over your body? Which of your appetites is most clearly refusing to submit to God's will? Perhaps it is an unbridled love of food, or drink. Perhaps it is in the area of sexual pleasure, or maybe it is an addiction to alcohol or tobacco, or some other drug. Maybe you are lazy, and lie around when you should be working or exercising and keeping in shape. Where are you physically weak and what are you willing to do about it? If you do not deal with it, it will affect everything, including your spirit.

Remember what Jesus said to his slumbering disciples: “Watch and pray that you not enter temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

3. The Christian life calls for a transformed mind.

This is a major element in distinguishing between mere legalism, the outward veneer of religious behavior, and a dynamic relationship with the living God. Paul describes the difference by contrasting conformity to the world with the inner transformation of our minds by the renewing power of God’s Spirit. The word he uses is metamorphosis, by which something becomes something greater than it was before, as when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly.

But we must feed this mind so that it can grow in wisdom rather than suffering atrophy. We renew the mind through the means of grace: God’s Word, study, meditation and prayer, and resting in God’s presence. We grow through public worship and receiving the sacrament faithfully. We grow through ministry and service, as we love one another in deed as well as in word.

4. The Christian life calls for a submissive will.

The goal of the sacrificed body and transformed mind is a life consecrated to the service of Christ, to be a person who no longer says, “My will be done,” but one whose will is subject to the will of God. A good test of where we are in all this is simply asking ourselves regularly whether we find God’s will oppressive, something that we seek to do only to avoid punishment, or whether we find it “good and acceptable and perfect.” Is it our delight, our joy to do his will? That is the aim, for in that God gets the greatest glory and we, as well as those around us, get the greatest good.

Conclusion

How will you respond to this call? God has shown us such great mercy. If we want life to begin again, we must give him our bodies, our minds and our wills. In losing ourselves we find ourselves, in dying to self we live the life we always wanted but never could find. Don’t miss what God offers you today.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 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.