

Romans: The Good News of God

Amazing Grace

Romans 12:1b

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Scripture

For the past few weeks we have been studying Romans 12:1-2. In Romans 12 the Apostle Paul begins applying the doctrine that he has been teaching for the previous 11 chapters. Now, it is not that he has made no application in the previous 11 chapters; he has. However, as he begins chapter 12 he is, in a sense, saying, “In light of all that I have taught, how should we then live?”

So, let’s carefully examine each phrase in Romans 12:1-2.

Let’s read Romans 12:1-2:

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, **by the mercies of God**, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do 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. (Romans 12:1-2)

Introduction

What is it that motivates people to be or do their best?

People are motivated by all kinds of different things.

Some people are motivated by challenge. Dale Carnegie, author of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, tells of a mill manager whose workers were not producing very much. The owner was named Charles Schwab, and he asked the manager what was wrong.

“I have no idea,” the manager said. “I’ve coaxed the men; I’ve pushed them; I’ve sworn and cussed; I’ve threatened them with damnation and being fired. Nothing works. They just won’t produce.”

¹ Much of this material is taken from James Montgomery Boice, *Mind Renewal in a Mindless Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 23-34.

“How many heats did your shift make today?” Schwab asked.

“Six.”

Without saying anything else, Schwab picked up a piece of chalk and wrote a big number “6” on the floor. Then he walked away.

When the night shift came in they saw the “6” and asked what it meant.

“The big boss was here today,” someone said. “He asked how many heats the day shift made, and we told him six. He chalked it on the floor.”

The next morning Schwab walked through the mill again. The night shift had rubbed out the “6” and replaced it with an even bigger “7.”

When the day shift reported in they saw the “7.” So the night shift thought they were better than the day shift, did they? They’d show them. They pitched in furiously, and before they had left that evening they had rubbed out the “7” and replaced it with a “10.”

Schwab had increased production 66 percent in just twenty-four hours simply by throwing down a challenge.²

Some people are motivated by recognition. Students are sometimes motivated to work harder so that they can be recognized as the best in their class or team. Salesmen are often motivated to work harder because of the recognition they receive for superior performance. Athletes excel because of their desire for recognition.

And some people are motivated by freedom. “Give me liberty, or give me death!” is a famous quotation attributed to Patrick Henry from a speech he made to the Virginia Convention. It was given on March 23, 1775, at St. John’s Church in Richmond, VA, and is credited with having swung the balance in convincing the Virginia House of Burgesses to pass a resolution delivering the Virginia troops to the Revolutionary War. Among the delegates to the convention were future US Presidents George Washington and

² Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1963), 173-176.

Thomas Jefferson. Reportedly, those in attendance, upon hearing the speech, shouted, “To arms! To arms!”³ And, of course, as you know, over a year later the United States declared its independence from Great Britain, having won its freedom to self-government.

Lesson

The question I want to answer today, however, is what is it that motivates Christians to live the Christian life? Or, to use Paul’s language in Romans 12:1, what is it that motivates Christians “to present [their] bodies as a living sacrifice. . . to God”?

So, in our lesson today I want to examine:

1. The Motivation to Be a Living Sacrifice,
2. The Definition of Mercy, and
3. The Illustrations of Mercy.

I. The Motivation to Be a Living Sacrifice (12:1b)

First, let’s examine the motivation to be a living sacrifice. Paul said, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, **by the mercies of God**, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice” (12:1b).

Romans 12:1-2 are remarkable verses, which is why I am spending so much time unpacking each phrase of these two verses.

In our first study of these two verses I gave you an overview of the two verses. Then, I started examining these verses phrase by phrase. First, I examined how these verses link to the previous eleven chapters of Romans. Second, I looked at the concept of “living sacrifice,” and explained that in Christianity we live by dying to self, as strange as that may seem. And third, I examined the nature of a “living sacrifice,” and observed that: (1) it is to be living, (2) it involves giving the various parts of our bodies to God, (3) it must be holy, and (4) if it is these things, then it will be acceptable to God.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Give_me_liberty_or_give_me_death#cite_note-0.

So, today I ask *why* should we present our bodies as a living sacrifice? That is, what is it that should motivate Christians to live the Christian life? Paul's answer is very simple: Because of **“the mercies of God.”** You should notice that the *English Standard Version* retains the Greek plural for **mercies**. In other words, Paul stresses that the motivation for living the Christian life is because of the multiple **mercies of God**.

We do not live the Christian life because we will earn favor or merit with God.

We do not live the Christian life because it is good for us.

We do not live the Christian life because we will get into trouble with God if we don't.

No, the reason for living the Christian life is because of **“the mercies of God.”** And so John Calvin, whose 500th birthday we celebrate this year, said, “Paul's appeal teaches us that men will never worship God with a sincere heart, or be roused to fear and obey him with sufficient zeal, until they properly understand how much they are indebted to his mercy.”⁴

II. The Definition of Mercy

Second, let's examine the definition of mercy.

The biblical meaning of mercy is exceedingly rich and complex, as evidenced by the fact that several Hebrew and Greek words are used for *mercy*. Consequently, there are many synonyms employed in translation to express the dimensions of meaning involved in *mercy*, such as “kindness,” “lovingkindness,” “goodness,” “grace,” “favor,” “pity,” “compassion,” and “steadfast love.”⁵

It would be helpful to distinguish between *grace* and *mercy*.

Grace is usually defined as “God's unmerited favor.” J. I.

⁴ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. Ross MacKenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 263.

⁵ W. A. Elwell & P. W. Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 882.

Packer clarifies the meaning of *grace*: “The grace of God is love freely shown toward guilty sinners, contrary to their merit and indeed in defiance of their demerit. It is God showing goodness to persons who deserve only severity and had no reason to expect anything but severity.”⁶

Regarding *mercy*, James Montgomery Boice says that “*mercy* is an aspect of grace, but the unique quality of mercy is that it is given to the pitiful.”⁷ Arthur W. Pink says, “*Mercy*. . . denotes the ready inclination of God to relieve the misery of fallen creatures. Thus *mercy* presupposes sin.”⁸

III. The Illustrations of Mercy

And third, let’s observe some illustrations of mercy.

The first illustration of mercy is Adam. I believe that it is almost impossible for us to understand what it was like for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They had no sin, had never sinned, and had no desire to sin. God had said to Adam, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17).

Some time later, however, Adam and Eve did eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That evening God came looking for Adam and Eve.

“Where are you?” God called.

Adam and Eve had hidden among the trees when they heard God coming; they were terrified. God had said that they would die on the day they ate of the forbidden tree. Eve must have expected to die. Adam must have expected to die. “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself,” Adam said.

God then asked Adam, “Who told you that you were naked?”

⁶ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 120.

⁷ Boice, 51.

⁸ Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), 83-84.

Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

Adam said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."

Then God said to Eve, "What is this that you have done?"

Eve said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Genesis 3:9-13).

After hearing Adam blame Eve, and Eve blame the serpent, God began his judgments, beginning with the serpent.

God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:14-15).

God then said to Eve, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Genesis 3:16).

Finally, God said to Adam, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17-19).

Try to imagine yourself in Adam's place. God had told Adam that in the day that he ate of the fruit he would surely die. But here it is at the end of the day, and Adam and Eve were still alive.

Adam and Eve were understandably afraid of God after they had sinned. That is why they hid themselves from God.

But when God pronounced his judgments against their sin, he even announced the coming of a Redeemer who would bruise Satan's head and undo all his wicked work.

Furthermore, God killed an animal in Adam's place. This

was a vivid illustration to Adam of God substituting an innocent life to pay the penalty for Adam's own sin. And then God clothed Adam and Even with the skin of the animal that had been killed.

Adam must have been overwhelmed by an awareness of God's mercy. Adam deserved to die, but instead of killing him, God spared him and promised a Savior instead.

No wonder Adam then named his wife "Eve," meaning "life-giver" or "mother." It was his way of expressing faith in God's promise, for God had said that it was from the seed of the woman that the Redeemer would come.

The memory of God's mercy must have kept Adam looking to God in faith and living for God by faith through his long life from that time forward, for Adam lived to be eight hundred years old and was the father of the line of godly patriarchs that extended from him through his third son Seth to Noah.

The second illustration of mercy is Paul. In his earlier days Paul was called Saul, and he was a fierce opponent of Christianity. He was a Pharisee, the strictest sect of the Jews, and he was zealous for the traditions of his fathers. This led him to participate in the martyrdom of Stephen, and he followed that by arresting and otherwise persecuting many of the early Christians. Having done what he could in Jerusalem, Paul obtained letters to the leaders of the synagogues in Damascus and went there to arrest any Christians he could find and carry them off to Jerusalem for trial and possible execution.

On the way Jesus stopped him. There was a bright light from heaven, and when Saul fell to the ground, blinded by the light, he heard a voice speaking to him.

"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Paul asked, "Who are you, Lord?"

And the voice said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

At this point Paul must have been devastated. He thought he was serving God, but instead he was destroying the work of God. He had done great harm, even participating in the killing of Stephen.

In that first moment of Paul's dawning apprehension, when he recognized that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was speaking to him, he must have thought that Jesus had appeared to him to judge him. He certainly deserved it. He must have expected to have been struck down and to die.

But instead Jesus sent him to Damascus, where he was to be told what he should do. When the message came to him by a disciple named Ananias, it was that he was to be God's "chosen instrument. . . to carry [Jesus'] name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:1-15).

Paul's life was transformed by the mercies of God.

That is why, years later, he could write to his young friend and co-worker Timothy, saying, "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

It was because Paul knew himself to be a sinner saved only by the mercies of God that he joyfully gave himself to God as a living sacrifice and worked tirelessly to please him.

The third illustration of mercy is John Newton. Newton ran away to sea as a young boy and eventually went to Africa to participate in the slave trade. His reason for going, as he later wrote in his autobiography, was that he might "sin his fill." Sin he did! But the path of sin is downhill, and Newton's path descended so low that he was eventually reduced to the position of a slave in his master's African compound. This man dealt in slaves, and when he went off on slaving expeditions Newton fell into the hands of the slave trader's African wife, who hated white men and vented her venom on Newton. Newton was forced to eat his food off the dusty floor like a dog, and at one point he was actually placed in chains. Sick and emaciated, he nearly died.

Newton eventually escaped from this form of slavery. But he was still chained to sin and again went to sea transporting slaves

from the west coast of Africa to the New World. It was on his return from one of these slave voyages that Newton was wondrously converted.

During a fierce storm at sea he thought that he was going to die. However, God brought to his mind Scripture verses that he had memorized at his mother's knee. And he found himself saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

When the ship arrived home, he left the slave trade and became a minister of the grace of God.

What was Newton's motivation? It was a profound awareness of the grace and mercy of God toward him, a wretched sinner. Newton wrote these words:

Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found—
Was blind, but now I see.

Newton never forgot God's mercy to him.

Once a friend was complaining about someone who was resistant to the gospel and living a life of great sin. "Sometimes I almost despair of that man," the friend remarked.

"I never despair for any man since God saved me," said Newton.

When Newton was very old and his mind was failing, he was forced to stop preaching. However, when friends came to visit him he frequently said, "I am an old man. My mind is almost gone. But I can remember two things. First, I am a great sinner. And second, Jesus is a great Savior."

Certainly the mercies of God moved Newton to present his body as a living sacrifice to God and to live for him his entire life.

Conclusion

Your experience of the mercies of God is similar to that of

Adam, Paul, and John Newton.

Paul said of you in Ephesians 2 that before you experienced the mercies of God “you were dead in the trespasses and sins” (2:1). You were “following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air” (2:2), and “were by nature [an object of God’s] wrath” (2:3). You were “separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (2:12). That was your condition.

But now listen to what God did. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-7).

That is what is meant by “the mercies of God.”

It is the mercies of God that motivates Christians to live the Christian life. It is the mercies of God that motivates Christians “to present [their] bodies as a living sacrifice. . . to God.”

When you properly understand the mercies of God, you will have no trouble presenting your body as a living sacrifice to God.

When you fully appreciate all that God has done for you in Jesus Christ, you will respond as Isaac Watts did in his great hymn, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”:

Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

May God help us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to him because we are the recipients of the mercies of God. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAAYER:

O Lord, you call us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to you because of the mercies of God. Help us to do so fully, immediately, and completely.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.