



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Mercy

June 7, 2020

Romans 12:1-2

Clint Pressley

12 I 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. 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.

(Pastor prays)

I'm a 51-year-old white man living in the painful summer of 2020. I pastor a church of black, brown and white people led by black, brown and white pastors. And in the fog of sorrow and worry in the last few weeks, I have felt like Paul when he said, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Certainly not me. I know I love God and I love my brothers and sisters at Hickory Grove Baptist Church - my family. And it kills me to see any of you hurt.

God was kind to me and Connie when He brought me to this great church. But that's who God is, kind. And in His kindness He has brought us to a mountaintop passage, even though many of us feel like we are in the valley of the shadow of death.

Romans 12:1-2 can be a turning point in your life just as it is a turning point in the Bible. This passage is an appeal. This passage is addressed to the people of God. In the book of Romans it's the Jews and Gentiles. For us at HGBC, it's black, brown and white. This letter is addressed to the people of God and it's concerned with the will of God. How do we take the Gospel that we love so dearly, the Gospel of Jesus, His life, death and resurrection that reconciles us to God? How do we live that so that we are reconciled to one another? Because reconciliation to God at the cross means reconciliation to one another at the cross. I think Paul now takes all the theology and doctrine he's taught in the last 11 chapters and tells us what to do with it! Because here's what we staunchly believe.

A Broken World Needs the Healing Power of the Gospel.

What do we do?

We dive into mercy

Isn't that what Paul says in his appeal in verse 1? "I appeal to you therefore brothers by the mercies of God." The overcoming mercies that God has shown to each of us at the cross of Jesus. While we were yet sinners, Christ *died* for us. God loved us and adopted us and forgave us in mercy so that we are now his sons and daughters. Even though we were wretched sinners, offensive and his enemies, he showed us mercy and now that mercy shown must be mercy lived. Because I have been purchased, washed, forgiven and changed by mercy, my life must reflect that. It must be saturated by that. I must reflect on the cross of Jesus and God's mercy shown to me there every time I go to join in an argument or make a post or try to prove a point. I've got to keep diving into mercy because sin tries to get me to keep floating up out of it. It's why we must keep the cross of Jesus central, because the cross is the mercy fountain for a dry and hate-filled world. And I don't have any great answers except to dive into mercy with kindness and humility and waiting and loving all because of what Christ has done for me. So I'm asking you to run to the mercy of God found in Jesus and then live there taking the posture of love and kindness and mercy because our broken world needs the healing power of the Gospel. So we dive into mercy. Let me tell you what else I think we should do.

We live radically

I borrow that term "radical" from David Platt and his book named *Radical*. He says radical is actually normal Christian life. To see this, read the whole sentence and then we can work backward. **12** *I 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.* Do you see where it says, "which is your spiritual worship" or your translation might say "which is your reasonable service"? Basically Paul is saying, *this* is what Christian life looks like in the light of all that God has done for us in Christ at the cross. It just makes sense to live our lives a certain way.

What then is *normal* Christianity? Go back to verse 1. "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." You've got to follow here. You have three adjectives describing one action. See the one action, "present your bodies as a sacrifice." The very language of this phrase brings forth Old Testament imagery of a sacrifice put on the altar to be burnt up as a

pleasing aroma to God. To give yourselves -- your bodies — the totality of who you are, sanctity of life, marriage, sex, image of God.

How do we explain sacrifice? It is forgoing something you really want to obtain something even greater. An illustration would be having hard and truthful conversations about racism, which can be very uncomfortable, in order to bring about something better, God-centered racial reconciliation. And that happens face to face. It's a sacrifice, giving up the high ground in order to find common ground, and for Christians that means coming to Christ and His cross. So few of us actually know what it means to sacrifice attitudes, opinions and privileges. And it's the very thing Paul is calling "normal" Christianity, your spiritual worship!

So we should dive further into this and ask what is the nature of the sacrifice I am to make? There are three adjectives to help us better understand what it means to present ourselves as a sacrifice: living, holy, and acceptable to God. Living sacrifice is...

True Conversion

It's what Paul said in Romans 6:11, *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.* And in Romans 6:13, *Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.* And in Romans 8:13,

For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Are you a living sacrifice? Have you repented of your sins, turned to Christ in faith, trusting, clinging to the finished work of Christ on the cross? If so, what deeds and attitudes of the flesh do you need to put to death today? Anger, hatred, pride, malice, racism, favoritism, prejudice, defensiveness? Are you a living sacrifice? We are most alive when we are most uncomfortable for the glory of God. That's true conversion. There is something else.

Real Sanctification

To get this I'm going to put those other two adjectives together. *Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.* Holy is set apart from the profane. It's acceptable to God because of the great exchange at the cross. Jesus took your sin and you received His righteousness. And because you are covered in His righteousness, you are acceptable to God, and without it you are not! That word "holy" is where we get the idea of sanctification which

means growing more and more like Christ. Jerry Bridges describes it in his book *Pursuit of Holiness*. It's an ongoing work. That's the kind of radical life we want to live, growing stronger in the Word and prayer, getting a fuller grasp on grace and having deeper hatred for our sin and living a life that is pressing the Gospel of Jesus into every secret place in our hearts. There is not a person here who would say they don't hate racism; we want a *deeper* hatred of it. It's a total commitment to Christ, saturated, radical humility starting to shine the light of the Gospel into the chaos of sin for our cultural moment. Because a broken world needs the healing power of the Gospel.

We dive into mercy. We live radically.

We act decisively

To see this let's take the whole verse. Here Paul is telling us how we can discern what the will of God is for our lives. See that at the end. Let's take the commands together. 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.* We need to reject outward conformity and embrace inward transformation. That's a negative and a positive. There are things a Christian must *do* and there are things a Christian must *reject*. We can't be conformed to this world, this evil age, or the spirit of the day. Don't be pressured, bent, pushed, bullied, harassed, convinced to conform to this evil age. How do we fight it? See that word "transform"? That is metamorphosis. This is a work of God. This is what we pray for, a change of heart. This is the fundamental transforming of character and conduct away from this world order with all its darkness and into the image of Christ. This is our goal as the people of God, to experience a continual, discernible change in us that results in nothing less than the glory of God and the flourishing of His people. We handle this cultural moment differently than this broken world because we believe that the broken world needs the healing power of the Gospel.

We dive into mercy. We live radically. We act decisively, ever pointing to the goodness of God found in Jesus.

(Pastor prays)