

Therefore!
Romans 12:1-2

We have just gone through a stunning doctrinal section where Paul defends his understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have seen doctrines such as total depravity, justification and sanctification, election, and personal responsibility and also the redemptive future of Israel. And now as we come to chapter 12 extending all the way through 15:13, where Paul deals with the ethic of the Gospel - how we should live and function as believers in Jesus Christ. And he first of all gives the appeal of why we should live the way we should live in verses 1-2. Then he follows this by applying what has just been taught in verses 1-2. He handles how our differing giftedness should function and how we should think and respond to one another in verses 3-13, then he handles all our relations both in and outside the church in verses 14-21. Then he handles a section that has been quoted and analyzed so much over the last year and a half and that is our relationship to government based on our gospel testimony and God's sovereignty in 13:1-7, then after that fulfilling the law of love in 13:8-14, and then he ends with a section on relationships between the weak and the strong, and how we should seek to treat one another in 14:1-15:13.

Much of these ethical instructions are also mentioned elsewhere in Paul's letters, but there are some specific sections, such as that citizens of the gospel need to be obedient citizens of the empire as witnesses of Christ. But what I want to begin to look at this morning is the ethical appeal in verses 1-2 that are the basis of everything that follows. There are two main parts to this appeal. One is positive, and the other is negative. The first is found in verse 1 and that is we need to offer ourselves wholly to God. And the second is in verse 2, and that is not to be conformed to the world.

And what I want to do is to begin to look at verse 1 this morning, and this verse has been taught and taught and taught, how we need to be dedicated to God, and be transformed more and more into the image of Christ. But there are a couple of things that I want to mention as we get started this morning. One is that you cannot divorce this verse from everything that has been said thus far. The basis of our Christian ethic and world view and how we function is what we know about God and what we know about his gospel. So often when we bring up children we do our best to bring them up morally. We teach them there are certain things they should do, and there are certain things that they shouldn't do. They should listen to mom and dad. They should not hit their brother or sister. But as children get older, because these truths have never been taught with with any sense of Christian ethic, because of who God and because of what he has done in Christ, they end up obeying by only counting the cost. If I can do it and dad doesn't find out I will do it, but if he does then I won't do it. The problem is that it is not anchored to the truth of God's word. Paul never taught morals or ethics devoid of truths about God, salvation and our testimonies.

The other thing that we see here along with that is even though many preach on Romans 12:1-2, the vast majority of teaching on Christian ethics is not anchored to what Paul says following these verses, but taught in isolation, and verses afterward are taught in isolation. So look at verse 9, "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good." When you preach this verse devoid of what Paul says in verses 1-2 you decide what is love, what is evil, and what is evil. It is so clear. But here it, the

way that we love is the way that God has loved us. Romans 5:7-8, says, **“For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** Then in verse 1 he commands us to be living sacrifices to God, well that includes sacrificial love of Christ right here as God defines love. The Bible says let your love be genuine. Don’t be judgmental - abhor that evil. The Christian ethic is based on so much more than just a set of rules and regulations. Do we realize or even think about that? Moral commands are redefined because they are not anchored in the truths of who God is, what he has said, and what he has done for us as believers. So let us look at a couple things this morning and hopefully challenge our hearts to live according to the gospel.

1. We must live according to the “therefore” of God. V.1a.

There should always be a driving reason for why we do what we do every single day. We should be able to say this is why I do what I do as a believer in Christ. And let me say that this is exactly what Paul says right in this passage. And our lives, actions, and emotions should be built on something. And that is what Paul is saying here. Look how he begins this verse, **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers.”** Paul is making a strong and impassioned appeal to live and function and think and feel a certain way. And the key word here is “therefore.” It is looking back to all that Paul has just said through all the teaching and doctrines and indicatives in the last 11 chapters. And he is saying that this is the foundation of why you live and function the way you do. These truths and the God of these truths becomes the driving force.

“Therefore” means that our actions are built on something. If a baby was just born into your family. There would be a necessary action to follow. We therefore bought a car seat or a crib or whatever. But based on the truth of a baby there is a “therefore.” So think of what Paul is saying because if you do not get it, then you cannot understand the next several chapters and the weight of them. The “therefore” says that these commands and imperatives are built on something. It has roots. It has reason. It isn’t just what God just somehow arbitrarily decided. So the foundation of what we build our lives on is the truths of the opening 11 chapters.

And people want to divide theology from ethics or how we should live and function from what we know about God, and you just cannot do that. The strength in how we live and love and forgive and treat one another is based on the substantial and glorious truths of the opening 11 chapters, and when we are amazed and mesmerized or taken up with them, there is an ethic, functionality, and world view that comes out of that. But so often we preach and teach commands that is rootless and baseless. You have that thing against your brother - you got to forgive him. Husbands love your wives. Wives submit to your husbands, and we all do our part we will have such a happy life. That is nothing but pseudo Christianity, and without any foundation that it really cannot help anyone, and certainly does not have God and his glory as the supreme reason of why we do what we do.

So let me give a couple of applications to this “therefore.” We will see in this verse once again that the primary reason we live the lives that we live is because of the mercies of God. Therefore because of the mercies of God live this way. It indicates not

only is our life built on the foundation and motivated by the mercies of God, but our lives and how we live are visual representations to the world around us of none other than the mercies of God. By the way I live and function I either show who God is and his bountiful grace that has been shown me or I detract from that grace. Because of the truths of Romans 1-11 therefore I live the life of Romans 12-15. Let me ask you - do you see that connection and are you making that connection in your life? It is not earning favour or making yourself more acceptable to God, but it is a response to God on the basis of who he is and what he has done for a sinner like me. Our lives are to be a visual demonstration of his mercy and love. As other people look at your life, whether unsaved relations, or co-workers or neighbours should be able to look at your life and see an illustration of the gospel of Christ being lived out, whether the humility of Christ in thinking more of others than ourselves, Christ-like love that is sacrificial and giving, to forgiveness no matter what the infraction. All of life is lived out in light of this "therefore." Our lives can never be the same.

And the second application is as parents this should help you raise your children so much more biblically and in a mercy-centred way. You don't just say to them, "do what I say not what I do," or the most popular way is to quote Ephesians 6:1-2, **"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise)."** Parents love those verses, but they never teach the why of those verses. So our word is basically negative - don't watch that movie or video, don't dress that way, don't associate with those kinds of friends, or don't use drugs. But we miss the gospel. It would be: how can I live in a way that I show my siblings and friends and others the glory of the gospel of Christ? How can I treat others and live a life that shows that Jesus didn't just come so that I can be cool in others' eyes, or dress in such a way to catch the eyes of someone of the opposite sex, or that there is no such thing as sin or eternity?

And it begins with you living in such a way that you show and also teach your children and those around you that there is more to life, more and glorious aspects of life than money, or materialism, or sports and leisure, or looks, more to life than this life here. After 11 chapters, Paul has a "therefore," and he is saying that life cannot remain the same.

2. We must live according to the mercies of God. V.1a.

Sometimes we just need to stop and meditate on a text to see what it is truly saying and let it impact us the way that it should. Paul has just had eleven chapters of deep and glorious theology, and then he gives us the "therefore," and then he chooses out of everything that he has just talked about to say that we ought to construct our lives on the mercies of God - the mercies of God that were shown to us. So here is the question: why did Paul chose to pick out "mercy" out of everything else that he has talked about? We saw mercy last in 11:32, **"For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all."** This verse speaks of the mercy shown to both Jew and Gentile in the gospel of Christ. We also saw God's mercy in chapter 9, and God's sovereign right to give mercy on whomever he will. So the word mercy has played an important part in the opening 11 chapters.

But why out of all the theological subjects does he choose this one? He has taught on the glories of justification and how Christ has done it, he has taught us that

the Spirit of God changes us, or how God uses all things even the difficulties of life to help change us into the likeness of Christ, and taught the glories of election, so why does he chose to base your life and my life in how we respond to these truths on mercy? And the reason why is because mercy is what these chapters are all about. It is the great summary word that encapsulates everything that he has written on the stunning mercy of God whether justification, sanctification or election. It is all about mercy.

God's mercy is simply God's goodness toward those who are in distress and misery. We can see this in Matt. 9:27 where the two blind men cry out to Jesus, "**Have mercy on us, Son of David.**" They were in misery and could not help themselves, so there only hope is the mercy of God. We recognize that we were in the misery of sin, and there is no way that we could help ourselves. There was nothing that we could do. We could not and would not live the life that God called sinners to live. We were in slavery to sin, dead in sin. But Christ came, lived that perfect life and sinless life that none of us could ever live, and then dies in our place for our justification. And then gives us new life to believe and trust in him. He lifts the helpless and the miserable out of the distressful situation that they could never lift themselves out of.

And those who have been given such mercy respond by giving mercy, not because we have to, but out of the overflow of love and gratitude and glory of the mercy that we have received by God. And please understand that mercy is more than feeling pity on individuals. I might see someone on the news in a foreign land in famine and my heart might be touched with pity and compassion. But that is not mercy. Mercy goes beyond feeling, to action. It is so touch by the glory and bigness of the mercy that we receive that it wants to give that mercy. So what does that mercy look like? Mercy seeks to give the same mercy that we received and again it is not based on merit or worthy of the person that we are merciful to.

So look at verse 13, "**Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.**" It seeks to take our funds and invest it in the expansion of the gospel even though other individuals like us do not deserve the mercy of God. It seeks to open our homes and bless others. Look at verse 14, "**Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.**" We seek to bless others even though they might have made our lives miserable and hard and difficult. Isn't this what Jesus did on the cross? Look at verse 15, "**Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.**" We enter the lives of others and care deeply about them with every fabric of our lives. Again, it is not about what we can get but what God has given to us. Look at verse 16, "**Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.**" We are so good at making war, and not even realizing how proud we are. The gospel humbles us and shows the truth about ourselves, and causes us to relate, befriend, love and minister to people we never thought we would ever minister to. What changes us? The gospel of God's mercy.

And let me also say that mercy is not resignation or just not saying anything, or just always having a smile on your face. I have the power to cause others to suffer or not forgive or not seek to bless because of the harm they have done. God's mercy is courageous and bold and so different from the responses of the world. Never think of mercy as weak. Jesus was not weak on the cross. He was still eternal God. Mercy is

intentional and moves, and does not find the power and motivation to move because of other people but it finds its source and joy and direction in the God of mercies. And let me ask you: has the God of mercies changed you? Have the mercies that we have been studying in this book changed you, so much so that what you once were, you no longer are; so much so that your life is a visual display to others of the wonderful mercy that you have received from God?

This is the way that the new humanity created in Christ Jesus functions - how it functions toward those who are inside Christ and those who are outside. The overflow of joy we have in Christ causes us to associate with them in a far better and different way that speaks of the gospel. But let me ask you: does this gospel work? Does it really change lives and hearts, and cause us to live lives that are different, holier, even more content and more joyous because of what Christ has done for us? Does it really change us? Is much of what we read about in the following chapters really the outcome and overflow of what we read and studied in the opening 11 chapters?

I found this interesting as I studied this passage, I came across a study or poll that was mentioned by James Montgomery Boice, that Gallop put out. They wanted to see if religion really made a difference in people's lives. The only problem is much of society is immoral. So they asked in the poll to classify themselves, and they looked for those who were "highly spiritual motivated," or very committed believers. They found that 12.5 percent categorized themselves this way. But they also found out that those who did were a "breed apart" from their counterparts in society.

They names four areas of life that were different. They were generally happier than other people in society. In society 30 percent said they were happy with their lives, but 68 percent among those who were in the highly spiritual category. Their families were stronger and more united, and the divorce rate was substantially lower. They also tended to be more tolerant of people from different races and religions, and that is surprising when you think of how Christianity is many times portrayed as a bunch of racists and bigots. And they were more involved in charitable activities of one kind or another in helping to alleviate the hurting and less fortunate.

And here is my whole point - whatever your life is based on, whatever the "therefore" is based on makes a difference. And if your life is based on the mercies of God it is fundamentally different than the lives around you. And the only thing that can bring that change is the living Lord of mercy - Jesus Christ. See and glory in and meditate on the bigness of the Jesus of your salvation. He really will change you.