

Our Altar-ed Life

January 10, 2021

Overview

We often feel frustrated by our inability to change. Promises we make to ourselves go unfulfilled, and we beat ourselves up for weakness and lack of discipline. But maybe we ought to be more gentle with ourselves—while also pursuing real, radical change. You see, many resolutions fail because we weren't made for those things; we're trying to be something we're not. But biblical change is predicated on the gospel which makes us new creations (2 Cor. 5:17). Biblical change is about *becoming who you are*.

Not that it's easy or automatic. Jesus said that part of our disciple-making mission is "to teach people to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18-20). We need teaching and training in the ways of heaven. We need to learn the *what, why, and how* of our transformed life.

The WHAT

Romans 12 is a pretty good summary of the "everything" Jesus commanded. It's not exhaustive, of course, but it's sweeping; it covers a lot of ground. It's a whole lot of the "what" of spiritual growth.

The WHY

But "why" get excited about all these commands? Why get on board with this vision for our lives? Well, Paul provides a spectacular but understated *why*. He says, "Therefore...in view of God's mercies." *Therefore* links cause to effect, reason to action. And the reason, the *why*, is Romans 1—11: the great doctrinal section of the greatest book in the Greatest Book every written! It starts in the depths of sin and ends at the heights of love. It explains God's body: Jesus given as a propitiation for our sin. And God's blessings: all things freely given with him. And God's power: all things working for our good. And God's love: always with us. (See Romans 3:23-26, 8:32, 8:28, and 8:38-39 successively.)

Why walk in our transformed life? Two words: God's mercies. God's *priceless, eternity-altering* mercies!

The HOW

The *how* of transformed living begins with offering our bodies back to God. God's mercies have altered our lives; therefore we *altar* our lives! We lay them on the altar as an act of "true and proper" worship. In Greek it's a single word: *logiken*. Logical. God offered his body to us; we offer ours to him. It's fitting. It only makes sense. But while his body was given as a dying, once-for-all sacrifice for sin; ours is given as a perpetual sacrifice of living, obedient love.

Not only is this "holy and pleasing" like worship; it's holy and pleasing like a wedding.



The classic old marriage vows from the 1500s said, "With this ring I thee wed; with my body I thee worship; and with all my worldly goods I thee endow." *All I am, all I have is yours.*

That's what God pledges to us. How can we not reciprocate? "Love so amazing, so divine demands my soul, my life, my all," body included.

Our Transformed Life
Living the Vision of Romans 12

Discussion Guide

1. Have you set any goals or resolutions for 2021? How are you doing with them?
2. The point was made in the sermon that many goals fail because we really weren't made for them; we're trying to become something we're not. But biblical change is different because it's becoming who you are: new creations, people already transformed at the core. Do you agree? Explain.

How does the fact that you are already transformed empower you to pursue and embody it?

3. Romans 12:1 opens with "Therefore...in view of God's mercies." This points back to chapters 1-11, using "God's mercies" as a summary for the whole doctrinal section of the book. Scan through those chapters (or at least 1-8) and pick out verses that capture some of your favorite mercies.
4. Read Romans 12 and count how many commands you find in this chapter.
 - If you were writing Romans 12, trying to cast a vision and paint a picture of the transforming effects of God's mercies, would you have written it this way? Explain. How would you be inclined to write differently?
 - Why do you think commands are so distasteful to us?
 - Consider that this chapter is not just written by Paul but by God. "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). Why do you think God wrote it with so many imperatives?
5. Read Romans 12 again and make two lists:
 - i. Instructions that feel ugly or undesirable to you.
 - ii. Instructions that speak of God's mercy—either care for the needy or grace for the guilty—being expressed through you.
 - Discuss your lists, sharing your thoughts about the things you wrote.
6. As one expression of offering our bodies to God as living sacrifices, we are calling our church to a 21-day fast. Talk about this:
 - What is the purpose of fasting?
 - Read about the "Daniel Fast" in Daniel 10: the things he gave up and the spiritual breakthrough God gave. How does this inspire you? What breakthroughs could you seek over the next three weeks?
 - Is there any way you might work as a team on this, encouraging each other and praying for each other?

