

RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND - Knowing How the Life of God Gets Inside - Part twelve - Teaching #2170

Sunday, March 6th, 2022, 6:30 p.m.

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

LOVE GOD WITH YOUR MIND BY FEEDING IT WITH THE BOUNDLESS MERCY OF GOD

Romans 12:1-2 - “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. [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.”

The issue of today's text is one that is so big that it's easy to miss. It's like the air you and I breathe each moment, not thinking about it at all. But if suddenly you had absolutely no oxygen - you sat right where you are, but, try as you might, you could no more find any air than you could find 100 feet under water - **then** you'd think fast and deep about how precious air is. And the big issue Paul is putting up before us is not just that of **living** the Christian life (though he does deal with that), but our **motivation** for living the Christian life.

And here's why I said this is such a huge issue - like that of the air we breathe. If the Christian walk is perceived as a task or assignment it will always be forced in terms of carrying it out. And if the engine driving the walk with Jesus isn't pleasurable and delightful, only the most strong in will-power will carry it out even occasionally. The easiest way to reach the human will and capture it eternally isn't with **duty**, but with **delight**.

This is why the Devil captured the human race in Eve and Adam's original sin, not by **forcing** them to disobey God, but by making them **want** to disobey God. He knew, in all his craftiness, that the way to capture the human will is through **desire**, not **duty** - **Genesis 3:1-5** - **"Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" [2] And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, [3] but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' " [4] But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. [5] For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."**

This is why we should pay particular attention to the way Paul finishes the two verses in our theme text for this series. The good news is Paul ends his famous appeal in Romans twelve one and two with his description of living in the will of God as being **"...good, acceptable and perfect"(2)**. The bad news is, for many, this is not an accurate description of the process of living the Christian life.

The Christian life is **good** in the sense that we're **supposed** to live it. We try to teach our kids that they **should** obey Jesus and be good Christians. But when they look at our lives they may not always **see** that seeking Christ first, while **good**, is not **so** good that every other good thing on planet earth seems meager and dull compared to it.

If you don't believe me just ask yourself why in the world would we have to expend so much effort and energy encouraging and pleading and begging people to keep going and growing with God? Why do people have to be nudged into something that is not only **good**, but **absolutely perfect**?

That's the issue we want to address in this teaching. If people are to **live** the Christian life properly they must **perceive** it properly. In other words, you don't just "**get saved**" and bolt out of the starting gate. That initial energy may or may not carry you very far down the track. That's why we took a whole week studying the "**Therefore**" at the beginning of our text. The renewed mind comes from **somewhere** not **nowhere**. There are foundations and reasons that make everything else work properly.

Today we are going to get a little more specific as to the shape and substance of those foundations. Paul is going to tell us something from our text that will ***keep our walk with Jesus delightful, not just dutiful***. Paul says there is a key - it doesn't work automatically - but it's a key none the less, that will ***renew*** the believer's mind. That is, it will ***keep making things new*** in your walk with Jesus. It will ***keep it fresh***. The Spiritual walk should ***grow*** in depth of joy. It should ***keep*** the new car smell. This foundation will ***rejuvenate joy*** and ***awaken fresh hope***.

So we want to know what this foundation is and how it is applied:

- 1) **THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN DO TO COOPERATE WITH THE SPIRIT IN THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND IS TO TURN YOUR MIND CONSCIOUSLY TO THE MERCIES OF GOD**

Romans 12:1 - "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."

The "***therefore***" links Paul's appeal to the content of the previous eleven chapters of Romans. There's a lot in those chapters. They are just full of the doctrinal meat of grace. And the "***therefore***" reminds us none of it is irrelevant or superfluous. The renewed mind comes from ***somewhere*** not ***nowhere***.

But then Paul focuses in even more tightly on what he has in mind. “The things I’m calling you to now live out can’t just be done because I’m telling you to do them. They need fuel to get off the ground. And the fuel is the mercy of God. But I don’t mean just **experiencing** the mercy of God. And I don’t mean just **believing** in the mercy of God. I mean **knowing absolutely everything there is to know about the nature of that mercy, the source of that mercy, the power of that mercy**. I’m talking about your **mind** and how you **soak it in the weighty truth of the mercy of God!**”

The truth of the abounding mercy of God in Christ Jesus is to your mind what uranium is to a nuclear reactor. It’s at the **core** of everything else about you. Read about it. Memorize verses about it. **Talk** about it. Because when you **ponder** it prayerfully you will **cherish** it. And when you cherish it, it will become fuel in the renewal of your mind.

Soaking your mind in the mercy of God will **draw your will with thankful, humble delight** rather than **drive it in mechanical duty**. Filling your mind with the meaty, might truths of grace turns **duty** into **worship** - “**...which is your spiritual worship (12:1)**.”

This is exactly why Paul directs his readers' attention **backward** to Romans 1 through 11 **before** he directs them forward to Romans 12 through 16. These first eleven chapters of Romans are a tale of the mercies of God. Even the chapters that don't, at first glance, **appear** to be about mercy at all really do resound with mercy when you consider them fully and deeply.

Romans 1 and 2 seem to hold out nothing but a sad tale of our sin and rebellion against God. Everything is black and hopeless. And they're **meant** to be like that because only the truth about our actual situation, our utter bankruptcy and hopelessness, sets the stage properly for the mercies of God.

It's for people the likes of **us** - people who couldn't possibly **earn** their status or favor before God - for whom the righteousness of God has been made freely available through Christ:

Romans 5:6-10 - “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— [8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [9] Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. [10] For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”

Do you see the wonderful, hope-filled news in those words? Never let anyone tell you that you weren't so bad apart from Christ. Those who try to build your esteem with flattery do you no favor. You're being cheated. Here's why we must always let the Bible speak its own message. ***The worse we are without Christ the better.***

Because I was so lost and sinful and unworthy of Christ's grace then, when He came and died for me on the cross, I know that I need never worry ***now*** about qualifying for His grace either.

That's Paul's whole point. It's the doctrine of my utter sinfulness and unworthiness before God that is the ground for my assurance of His ongoing presence and mercy now - **Romans 5:10** - **“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”**

Now, remember where we are in our teaching. This is just one of many examples of the mercies of God as they're unfolded in Romans 1 through 11. This is how Paul means we are to ***think through*** the meaning of ***“the mercies of God.”*** This is the truth Paul sends us back to if we would renew our minds and transform our lives.

But how? How does this work? Why does Paul call us to look intently at this kind of doctrinal truth and honestly make his appeal to Godly living on the basis of it? **Romans 12:1** - **“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.”**

Perhaps Jesus, more than anyone else, expanded on the very thing Paul is telling us in these two verses from Romans 12. Listen very carefully to a simple incident from the life of Jesus. Try to pretend you've never heard this account before:

Luke 7:37-47 - "And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, [38] and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. [39] Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." [40] And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." [41] "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. [42] When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" [43] Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." [44] Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. [45] You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. [46] You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. [47] Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."

Take note. Jesus uses a decidedly **non-religious** person in His story to teach something important to a highly trained and seriously devout Pharisee. Surprisingly, the Pharisee in Luke's account isn't as moved to serve Jesus as this "sinful woman." And this cuts to the core of the **reason** Paul pleased with us to return to the mercies of God as the motive for renewed minds and transformed lives.

The Pharisee, who is prompted by every religious system and rule and regulation you could imagine, was never drawn to devotion to Jesus by the call of **duty**. This sinful woman, who knew **none** of the rules and regulations and religious duties of the Pharisee, was openly **drawn** to worship and serve Jesus. The woman - only identified as a "**sinner**" did more for Jesus than the Bishop.

Why? What was working in her life that wasn't working in the Pharisee's? Jesus tells us. She understood she had been forgiven much. She wasn't actually forgiven for **more** sins than the Pharisee. That's not Jesus' point. But she **thought more** about the mercy she had received. She was drawn, warmed, and delighted to adore Jesus because her mind and heart were steeped in the rich mercies of God. And, just like Paul said, the mercies of God will motivate you far beyond religious duty.

Back to us. I know we all **believe** in the mercies of God. I know we could all recite the basic theology of grace and forgiveness. I know we all **understand** and **agree** with the Biblical premiss that we're sinners saved by grace. But I'm not talking about any of those things. The **mind-renewing power** of the mercies of God isn't in any of those things.

I'm asking you how many times a day - while you're at work or driving your car or cleaning your house - how many times do you pause, get purposely still and quiet, and back up your brain, and just **consider** the mercies of God to you in Christ Jesus. How regularly do you **recall** the mercies of God? Paul says that's where the power for Godliness comes from. Jesus says so too.

2) **THE MERCIES OF GOD ARE THE ANTIDOTE TO THE THINGS THAT MOST FREQUENTLY WEAR CHRISTIANS OUT AND PULL CHRISTIANS DOWN SPIRITUALLY**

If reveling in the mercies of God **renews** us, then neglecting God's mercies **ages** us - wears us out before our time.

There are ***two calls of God*** on every person who claims the benefits of Christ's death and Resurrection. We are called to ***renew our minds*** daily in God's mercies and we are called to ***glorify and extend God's mercies*** - **Romans 15:8-9** - "For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, [9] and **in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy**. As it is written, 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.'"

Everything hinges on this. When you were saved did you comprehend the nature of the call of the gospel? We are to ***renew*** our lives daily in God's mercy and we are to help others ***marvel*** at God's mercy. We're not just called to enlist people to social engagement. We're not just out to save the rainforest. There's something even bigger.

We are called to ***reveal*** God's mercy in Jesus Christ to others in both our words and our actions. This is how Christianity spreads and grows. Jesus came to make God's mercy look great. Jesus saved you and filled your life with God's mercies to make them ***manifest*** through you to others.

But how does this work? Because it doesn't always happen. I've been around the church long enough to realize that many Christians **profess** the mercies of God more than they **extend** the mercies of God. And this kind of **deformed** spirituality burns people out long before their time.

I've seen it over and over. People get miffed because someone is ministering on the platform and they don't think that person has treated them fairly. Another person gets upset because he sees someone else raising their hands in worship and they don't think that person was honest with them. Someone quits working with children because someone else spoke too harshly to their kids. Another person leaves the church because one of their friends didn't get along with one of the department leaders.

All of those true stories have one thing in common. Somewhere along the way, amid all the activities of church and work and family, some church-goer quit thinking of himself as a **redeemed sinner** - a **miracle of God's mercy**.

And as sure as I'm standing here, when that happens he stopped seeing **other people** as redeemed sinners too. And when we shelve the "**mercies of God**" we lose the fuel to do two things. We can no longer renew our minds, no matter how brilliant, and we stop transforming our world. And all we'll have to pass on to our kids will be a dull, religious list of rules.

So much is at stake here, church. Remember, make mercy the **operating system** for all the other programs of your life. Only **thinking about** and **manifesting** the mercies of God will keep you **renewed in the Spirit of your mind - "I urge you by the mercies of God that you present yourselves....."** Whenever you aren't **recalling** the mercies of God to your own life, and whenever you are manifesting something **other** than mercy to others, you are out of the will of Father God. And you just can't be fruitful there.