

As we continue our worship this morning, if you will turn with me in your Bibles to Romans chapter 12, our scripture reading this morning is going to be in the passage that we will study, and the reason for that will be clear as we get into that phase of our worship. But this section of Romans is continuing Paul's exhortation that he began in Romans 12, 1, urging us in the light of the mercies of God to present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. This is our reasonable service to not be conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

And that's an important introduction to this section, because it's very easy to understand what Paul is going to say in the center part of this chapter when he urges us to be considerate of one another, to express love in various ways. It's fairly clear what he is communicating. What is not always so clear is how to do that.

And that's what we're going to be concentrating on today, is having a clear understanding of what our calling is and what our obligation is and what our opportunity is with regard to love. How do we make that happen? So we might keep that in mind as we read this central portion of Romans chapter 12, beginning at verse 3. For I say through the grace given to me to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them. If prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith. Or ministry, let us use it in our ministering.

He who teaches, in teaching. He who exhorts, in exhortation. He who gives, with liberality.

He who leads, with diligence. He who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without hypocrisy.

Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another, not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer, distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another.

Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. As we look through this list of exhortations, most of them seem fairly clear, don't they? We understand the nature of this encouragement that Paul is giving us.

But it's kind of like as we grow older and approach middle age and we start seeing the sort of natural, God-given muscle tone and whatever amount of physical well-being that we started out with. It starts to kind of fade and deteriorate away. We start seeing wrinkles and we start seeing that we no longer have that just by nature.

It starts to be something that we have to work for. And so this occurs now a lot. Everyone is very health-conscious.

We're in the aftermath of the Pepsi generation, the me generation, all that kind of thing where we're all encouraged to stay fit and to go to ballets and try to stave off the ravages of time and to eat oat bran and be healthy physically and so forth. Well, that's a wonderful thing. I can sit there in front of the TV with a Coke in my hand as they're talking about stay fit, have good muscle tone.

They show all these people in their late teens and early twenties and I'm more than twice their age and they're saying, you know, you need to look like this. And that's really true. There are physical benefits to staying in shape and having a good diet and exercise and so forth.

And this passage sort of reminds me of those exhortations in the physical realm. It is a good idea to abstain from things that silt up your circulatory system and to get exercise and so forth. And people can tell us that and tell us what the benefits are and tell us all of the good things that we ought to be doing.

And we know that they're healthy and we know that they're good. We know that certain habits that we might have are detrimental to health. We know that.

It's a fact. We don't dispute it. But that knowledge and the encouragements that everyone gives us don't necessarily produce the motivation or the ability to put them into practice, do they? We know, but we don't do.

Why is that? Well, there has to be something on the inside that is sufficient in its quantity and its quality to compel us to make a change. And the knowledge that that's what we ought to do is not always compelling, is it? There's many things we know we ought to be doing, but knowing that isn't compelling enough in and of itself to make it happen. And that's what we have here.

We can look at this. I find it unlikely that anyone would argue with anything that Paul says. Even an unbeliever would not argue with any of these things.

We ought to be compassionate. We ought to look out for others. We ought to be considerate.

We ought, we ought, we ought. These are the things that are good. But is the knowledge that we ought to be doing this compelling enough to make it happen? Well, obviously not, because we all continue to operate along and we're selfish and self-centered and myopic and inconsiderate and we wound one another and hurt one another.

And it's one of the reasons we have recently done a study on forgiveness, because we often don't have this happen in our lives. So what we want to do this morning is we're not going to spend an inordinate amount of time exegeting these encouragements because they're clear, aren't they? What we want to do is take a look at what Paul has given us in this letter, in the book of Romans, that gives us that compelling motivation, that gives us the means for this to take place. So what I would like to do first of all is draw to our attention an interesting comparison contrast that we have right here in this letter.

Keep your finger in Romans chapter 12 and turn back with me to Romans chapter 2. Romans chapter 2. As I have mentioned many times during the course of this and other studies, context is one of the great tools that we have. It's one of the great provisions God has made to help us understand His Word and digest it and make good use of it. And Romans, I think, in many of the presentations that are made of Romans, has been a difficult book and part of the problem is that

we haven't kept in mind what's going on in the letter, what the situation was, why Paul wrote it, what his overarching argument is.

So at the risk of reviewing this at the point that would set someone's teeth on edge, we need to step back and remember what Romans is about. Why did Paul write this letter to begin with? There is a community in Rome composed of several local churches meeting in different homes, a community of believers, some of them are Jewish, some of them are Gentile, and there is an argument going on, there is a clash of understanding, a clash of commitment in terms of how one ought to live knowing that he or she is a believer. The Jewish crowd says, we've been doing this a long time, we've had a relationship with God for generations, we've got the Old Testament, to us belongs the law and the prophets and relationship with God, we're the keepers of the flame, we're the bearers of the torch, let us tell you how this is done.

Yes, Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of David, and yes, we accept Him, He's our Savior, but that doesn't change the fundamental underpinnings of faith and relationship with God as we understand it. And our understanding is you've got to keep the law to please God, and you'd better be keeping the law if you want to please us. We are going to judge you unrighteous and unworthy if you don't get circumcised, let us tell you about the feasts, let us give you some indoctrination into Deuteronomy and Leviticus, and let us show you the path of righteousness.

We will lead you in the way which we have already trod for many centuries. And Paul says that is a mistake, that's wrong. Look at the history of the Jews, you're going to wind up being led by the blind, because the whole reason God had to change the program is that Israel never figured out what God was really looking for, and they are now trying to lead you into the same error that they themselves have perpetuated for generations.

Why do you think those branches were broken out of the tree? Because they were dead, they were fruitless, and you have been grafted in so that you can bear fruit. But if you turn out being a dead branch like these Israelite branches, you too will be snapped off and your life is going to be fruitless and dead as far as value in God's plan. So this is what Paul has been arguing, isn't it? All through the book, he says, look at Abraham, you claim Abraham is your father, look at him.

God declared him righteous because he trusted the promises of God. He lived by faith and righteousness, the declaration of righteousness, which is called justification in our English translation. Being acceptable and pleasing to God, walking a worthy walk, is accomplished through faith.

There will be an outworking of that faith in righteousness and obedience and so forth, but the key and the first priority is faith. That's what Paul has been arguing, right? Well, remember back, how did he introduce this argument? How did he step into the middle of this fracas that's going on in Rome? He started by getting everybody on his side. He used sort of an oratory device or a speaker's device.

He said, let's think a little bit about the world out here and all of this terrible sin that's going on. There is one thing we can all agree on. This adultery and fornication and idolatry and all these bad things that are going on, this is terrible, isn't it? He says, look at all these ungodly people and these people who, even though God has put the knowledge of himself out there, he's displayed it in creation, he's planted it in their hearts, God the Holy Spirit witnesses to them, and yet when they know God, they don't glorify him as God.

They're not thankful, but they become empty in their imagination and their foolish heart is darkened. They're wise in their own eyes, they're wise in their own conceits. They think they've got a better way, and they choose something other than God.

And God says, okay, I've witnessed to you, I have drawn you, I have offered you the truth, and you're rejecting it, so whatever it is you're choosing in my place, have at it. It's yours. And God turns them over to these desires and lets them experience the full realm of satisfaction that's going to come from those things.

And of course those things don't satisfy, and they lead to misery, and they lead to pain and anguish, and they tend toward degeneration and destruction. And God turns people over to what they choose. Everybody says, yes, right, that's the way we understand it, all of us who've been keeping the law, these uncircumcised Philistines out here rejecting the truth of God, they deserve everything they get.

And you remember that great corner that Paul turns at the beginning of chapter 2, and he says, and you, O man, who are there pointing your finger and judging all of these people and saying, yes, look at how they've ignored the truth of God and have gone their own way, how can you stand there and judge them when you yourself, believer, are doing the very same thing? Remember that? Well, that's where we are here in Romans chapter 2. And he says, you are inexcusable if you're standing there judging these others, because when you judge them, you condemn yourself because you're doing the very same thing as a believer. And so he begins there, for example, in verse 3, Do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? How did Romans chapter 12 begin? What did Paul use as the basis of his exhortation? He said, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by what? By the mercies of God. The compassions and the mercies of God ought to be motivating us to change, ought to be motivating us.

We see his mercy if we look for it, if we're aware of it, and if we're sensitive to it, and that ought to motivate us. Paul says the basis of condemnation for these people is that having seen the riches of God's goodness, his forbearance, and his longsuffering, which is supposed to lead them to a change of mind, they despise that. They don't honor it.

They don't care about it. It doesn't become a part of their motivation. This is one of the great things about studying the Word of God, because every page of Scripture, every passage of Scripture, is a witness to the mercies of God.

It's a witness to God's compassion on us, His grace toward us. And if we have any sensitivity in our soul at all, it ought to make a difference. It ought to compel us.

It ought to motivate us. It ought to change the landscape of our thinking and direct our priorities in the direction of God's will and God's plan. Paul says here's the problem with the Jews who are leading people astray in Rome.

They despise the goodness of God. They despise His forbearance. They despise His longsuffering.

They don't recognize that the goodness of God, His mercies, are designed to bring them around to change of mind. He says in verse 5 of Romans 2, But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart, you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. And we saw when we went through this chapter how clear it is that Paul is addressing believers here.

An unbeliever cannot treasure up wrath. There is one penalty for rejection of Christ and that's the lake of fire. There are no hot spots.

There are no cool spots. There's no almost tolerable place in the lake of fire. And well, this is really not so bad.

Look at those people frying way down there in the 2,000 degree centigrade area and I'm just up here in the 1,000 degree centigrade. Separation from God, total separation from God that takes place in the lake of fire, there's no degree of total separation. It's an oxymoron.

It can't take place. If you're separate from God, you're totally separate from God in that lake of fire eternal punishment. This treasuring up of wrath, this is an amount that can accumulate just like gold and silver and precious stones can accumulate, wood and hay and stubble can accumulate.

Discipline from God in the life of a believer can accumulate in the same way that a parent has different degrees of punishment or different degrees of discipline for a child depending on how compliant they are, how willing they are to turn around. It doesn't take much to discipline a child who really is trying hard to please their parents. Sometimes just a look or just a verbal rebuke is more than enough to make them very sorrowful and very ashamed and very desirous of not repeating that offense.

There are other children who are very willful and very insensitive and uncaring about what their parents think. If their parents are unhappy, well, my parents don't know anything anyway. And it takes much stronger disciplinary measures to bring those children into line.

You see this in public school. You see it everywhere where you have children. What is their degree of respect? It takes a very little amount of guidance in some cases and a great deal in others.

Treasuring up of God's wrath depends on how compliant we are or non-compliant we are. It's a matter of degree. And anytime you see a judgment that is a matter of degree, it's going to be for believers.

Unbelievers, there's only one criteria. Sin has been paid for. It doesn't matter how many sins you commit.

The judicial penalty has already been paid. And there's not an element of fellowship involved in an unbeliever because there's no relationship. So there is no temporal effect of sin like we have for believers.

There's only one issue for an unbeliever and that's Christ. If they reject Christ, there is one penalty and that's the lake of fire. But these people are treasuring up for themselves wrath.

And why is that? Because they have a hard and impenitent heart. The goodness of God, the mercies of God ought to be compelling and ought to be making a change and it's not. And it's because they're willfully ignoring that.

They're willfully setting it aside because they want to pursue something else. And in accordance with that, they're storing up for themselves wrath in the day of judgment. So, he talks about the options for us as believers.

God is going to render in verse 6 of Romans 2, He will render to each one according to his deeds. Notice this is not a faith-based judgment. This is a deeds-based judgment.

If you try to make this unbelievers, then you've got salvation by works. If you try to say that this is the great white throne, it just will not work. This is rendering according to deeds.

Eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality. Now, when is the last time we ever thought that this was a criteria for salvation? Patient continuance in well-doing. Patient continuance in doing good.

Someone who is seeking for glory and honor and immortality. This is a believer. And this is one of the classic passages where our definition of eternal life helps us out because this is eternal in the sense of quality.

It's eternal in the sense of partaking of the divine, partaking of the eternal essence of God. Eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality. But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, there will be indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.

Who is it he's talking to in Rome about this problem of how to live the Christian life? The Jews first and also the Greeks. But there will be glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek for there's no partiality with God. As many as have sinned without the law will also perish without the law.

As many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law. And notice this in verse 13. It is not the hearers of the law who are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

Kind of reminds us of James, doesn't it? Be ye a doer of the word and not a hearer only, deceiving your own selves. And it's interesting here because the New King James and some of the other English translations do a good job of putting verses 13, 14, and 15 in parentheses because the content of verse 12 when he says those who are without the law will perish without the law. As many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law.

Then you can skip down to verse 16. That will take place in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel. But this is parenthetical in verse 13, 14, and 15.

It's not the hearers of the law who are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. Now, I thought this whole letter was being written about the fact that we don't have

to do the law. What's he talking about here? I thought the whole point was that righteousness comes by faith.

Well, he explains that. For when the Gentiles who do not have the law by nature do the things in the law, these, although they don't have the law, are a law to themselves. And what's the point? They show the work of the law written in their hearts.

The word of God makes a change in their hearts. Now, hopefully, even after this long a time, you still have your finger over in Romans chapter 12. So keep your finger in Romans 2 and go back to 12.

Paul has just said that the doers of the law will be justified who show the work of the law written in their hearts. How does Romans 12 begin? Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. Transformation in the heart, transformation in the mind takes place through the word of God.

People that Paul is talking to in Romans chapter 2 have not allowed that process to take place. They know the law, but it hasn't changed their hearts. They have a hard and impenitent heart, and they're storing up for themselves wrath on the day of judgment.

Paul says don't be that way. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you can prove, test out, and find to be approved the will of God. And I really wish that our English translations had translated Romans 12 to the way it is in the Greek because it uses the word dokimazo, which means to test out.

This is something we have to test out because we didn't start out living this way. Test out the will of God, and that's what it says in Greek, so that you may test out the will of God, the good, the acceptable, and perfect. Test out the will of God, the good, the perfect, and the acceptable.

Try it out and find it to be the approved way. This is what's going to bring blessing from God. This is what's going to bring fulfillment in life.

This is what's going to accomplish God's purpose and make the existence that we have in this life and in the next meaningful. So we have a contrast between the Romans 2 people and the Romans 12 people, at least what we're exhorted to be in Romans 12. Back in Romans chapter 2, remember in verse 3, he says, Do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things and doing the same thing, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering? They're not being changed by, they're not being motivated by, they don't find it compelling when they see the mercies of God.

It doesn't make an impact, it doesn't make a difference. But notice specifically that it mentions the goodness of God in verse 4 of Romans 2. Do you despise the riches of His goodness? Not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance, leads you to a change of mind. This idea of God's goodness and that goodness ought to be uppermost in our mind, the genuine good.

What does he say in Romans chapter 12, verse 9? Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

The mercies of God are what is good. The plan of God is what is good. The will of God, that good and acceptable and perfect, is what is good.

That's what we need to be clinging to, and it ought to make a difference. Because we're going to look at these exhortations in Romans chapter 12, and it says, Be selfless, esteem others more highly than yourself, minister to them perhaps at the expense of yourself, be generous, be thoughtful, let your spiritual gift function with regard to other people, rejoice in hope, be patient when you're in testing, and so forth. And people can say, be patient, have hope, rejoice, and so forth, and we say, well, that's easy for you to say.

You're not in my circumstances. You're not dealing with the people I'm dealing with. If you knew, if you were in my shoes, if you were associated with this person on a daily basis, you'd be talking out of the other side of your mouth.

You wouldn't be telling me, rejoice, have hope, be patient, give preference to them. How can I give preference to this person? Look at how they're treating me. Look at what they're doing to me.

Look at this history of abuse I've taken from this person, and you're saying that I should be looking for ways to be of benefit to them. I'm looking for ways to cut them off at the pass. I'm going to try to find out how I can apply the doctrine of separation and just get clear away from this person.

So, what is the means? How do we put this into practice? It's not enough to know that we ought to be all of these wonderful things. We ought to be some great saint of the past. Who was the guy that did all the animals? St. Francis of Assisi.

That's what I think of when I see all of these exhortations. He's out there. There's a dove lighting on his arm, and he's at peace with the world, and he forgives, and it doesn't matter what happens.

That's easy for someone to say, and it's easy for Paul to exhort us to, but where does the implementation take place? How do we make that happen ourselves and be obedient in this area? Well, we have to come back. We can't just look at a situation and say, oh, you know, here I am. I've got all this anger and this pent-up animosity toward this person, and I know I ought to be rejoicing.

If we just say, okay, well, I'm going to be patient. I'm going to buy them a card. I'm going to get them a little gift.

I'm going to go over and do something for them because I know that's what I'm supposed to be doing. That's not going to work. That's not going to fulfill this passage.

How did Paul introduce this section? Verse 9, Let love be unhypocrites, without hypocrisy. And if I'm seething on the inside and trying to minister and be beneficial on the outside, I'm hypocritical. I've got a mask going.

I've got a mask of love, and inside I'm not changed. That doesn't work. So what do we have to do? We have to find where the genuine compulsion, the genuine motivation, the ability to do this from the heart in genuine love comes from.

This is why we're going back and looking at the contrast in chapter 2 because here are people who have not got that, and they are hypocritical. What did Jesus say about the Jewish approach

to righteousness? Whitewashed tombstones look great on the outside, and inside you're full of dead men's bones. You're a brood of vipers.

You canvas heaven and earth to make a proselyte, and when you find Him, you make Him twofold the child of hell that you are. We don't want to do that. We want to avoid that, and this is how.

One of the first things we see is that the mechanism by which God transforms us is His own mercy, His own compassion. That's why Paul says, I beseech you by the mercies of God that you present yourselves, that you be transformed and not be conformed to the world. So the mercies of God are our starting place, and if we find ourselves wrestling in the area of fellow believers and not feeling love and not being disposed to finding ways to be beneficial and ministering and considering others more highly than ourselves, the starting place is not, what can I do to be loving in this situation? The starting place is, let me set that aside and go back and think about God.

Where do I stand in my relationship with God? What are the mercies and the compassions of God for me? That is what sets right the thinking of our soul.

You know how in an airplane up in the cockpit, you may or may not know this. I sometimes sit where I can look through the door of whatever airliner. I've been flying Southwest a lot lately, and if you sit up in the front section, before they close the door and prepare for takeoff, you can see the pilot and the co-pilot in there flipping switches and one thing and another, and right in the center of the dashboard or whatever they call that, there's this big round thing that is the artificial horizon, and it's got a line across the center, and the bottom part is black and the upper part is white, and even if it's fogged in or you're flying through the clouds or there's a terrible rainstorm or whatever, and you don't have any visual reference to the real world, the artificial horizon has got all kinds of gyroscopes and weights and things in it, so that it always shows you what the true orientation is, what is really up and what is really down, and without that, when the visibility is cut off, if you're turning, your body, because of inertia and so forth, is going to make you think that some particular direction is down and some other particular direction is up, and it's not so.

If you've ever ridden a roller coaster that does a loop-the-loop, you have so much centrifugal force that you feel like the world is circling around your head. You don't feel like you're upside down when you go through that loop-the-loop because the inertia gives you an artificial gravity, and it's very confusing because it looks as though the world is flipping around you and you are the reference. You are right side up and it's the world that is flipping 360 degrees around you.

Well, it's a classic picture of what happens to us when we get self-centered spiritually, when we're not thinking about the compassions of God. The only reference we have is ourselves, and we can be completely disoriented, completely upside down with reference to reality and God's view of things because we're self-centered and we're operating based on what we feel because of our inertia. And what do we need? We need an external reference.

We need something like that artificial horizon on the dashboard of the airliner that shows us what the real up and the real down is, and that's the mercies and the compassions of God. So when we find ourselves in difficulty with relationship to one another, this is our starting place.

This is where the Jews in Romans chapter 2 failed, and this is where people who want to heed Romans chapter 12 have to start.

It's the mercies of God. Rather than finding a way to justify or rationalize or find some artificial way to be pleasant and be loving and be compassionate to someone else, we need to stop and get away from that situation and get ourselves back in a genuine orientation with reality by focusing on the mercies and compassions of God. And every piece of Scripture, every doctrine, every principle, every promise that we have in our souls is a witness to the compassion and the mercy of God.

All we have to do is stop and think about our Lord, think about our Savior, think about God the Father who was willing to sacrifice His only Son, Jesus Christ who for the joy set before Him endured the cross and despised the shame and achieved the victory and pleased His Father and expressed His great love for us. If we take two minutes, three minutes, five minutes and dwell on the mercies and the compassions of God, that is going to put inside us divine power. It's going to start that lamp of eternal life glowing brighter and brighter in our soul and we will find that our selfishness, our self-centeredness, our arrogance, our human desires and human compulsions that are causing us to be selfish and self-centered and unable to love and unable to be compassionate are going to melt away like shadows that melt away when you bring a bright light into the room and it's the bright light of God's mercy that dispels the darkness in our soul and creates that power within us.

It's not something we have to generate. We don't have to work at love. We don't have to work at ministry.

We don't have to work at compassion or any of these things that are listed in Romans chapter 12. We shouldn't have to work at rejoicing in tribulation. We don't have to work at trying to have a bright expectation of the future.

We shouldn't have to work at prayer. We shouldn't have to work at blessing those who persecute us. These things come through the power of God but we have to make the choice and the starting place, the place to choose and the place to implement this is the mercy and the compassion of God.

That's what the people in Romans chapter 2 missed. Chapter 2 verse 4, Are you despising the riches of His goodness, His forbearance, His law and suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to a change of mind? What is it that can change our mind? It's the goodness of God. That's the power, that's the light and that's the way that this takes place in our souls.

And when we find ourselves struggling and find ourselves wrestling with our own nature and we know we're not doing the right thing, we know we don't have the right attitude, it's not in the circumstance or in the people that we're dealing with that we need to look for strength and for power and it's not even in our own soul. It's the goodness of God that leads us to change of mind. And that's what Paul starts this chapter with.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, be transformed so that you will know the good, the perfect, the acceptable will of God. That's the starting place for making these things happen. We don't have any difficulty understanding verses 9 through 16, do we? We have difficulty in making it happen in our own soul.

And we have the keys right here in this letter to see how that takes place. We're going to pause now and take our break and when we come back we're going to see some other interesting connections between chapter 2 and chapter 12 of Romans. But let's pause here and take our break.