

I draw your attention to **Romans 12:1-2**. The text will be on the screen. Read it with me... ¹ **Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.** ² **Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--His good, pleasing and perfect will.** Last week we considered at length the charge not to conform to the present worldview. It calls for such commitment and determination that Paul referred to it as being "a living sacrifice."

The concept of "*giving ourselves away*" to anyone is discouraged in our culture. Submission is considered a sign of weakness. Surrender is a choice for losers. The idea of voluntarily choosing to be a slave to someone is offensive. Even taking upon us the role of servant is looked upon as such a lowly and undesirable thing, that we are conditioned to resist, even to be repulsed by the very thought.

Yet, the Holy Spirit urges us to do this very thing_ and as promised, today we'll look at **the motivation** behind it. Paul sums it up in five words: "**In view of God's mercy.**" Mercy is being spared from punishment. It is leniency or clemency stemmed from deep compassion or pity. God the Father has granted us "*mercy.*" To fully appreciate this, we need to know what it is we have been spared from. What was it?

God created us to live in peace and safety, but because of selfish choices and sinful rebellion, all mankind ended up missing out on the blessing of a personal and intimate relationship with Him. Let that sink in a moment. People ask why God allows pain and suffering; why He permits evil and tragedy. "*Certainly He either doesn't exist or He doesn't care.*"

Romans 6:23 tells us the wage_ or consequence of our sin is death. Yet, we're not talking about merely a painful physical death_ as bad as that would be. We're talking of something far worse; continued rebellion causes a separation from God. Some see their existence on earth to be a living "*hell.*" It's the result of what theologians refer to as "*the fall.*" Apart from God, the author of love, life is filled with hurt and heartache. Even this might be bearable, if all suffering was over when we died_ but God's word says that is not the case. Even death would be a case of "*out of the pan and into the flames*"_ with souls residing forever in what Scripture describes as an everlasting "**lake of fire**". This pool of burning sulfur, as **Revelation 20:10-15** calls it, is not a subject we care to discuss. It was prepared for the devil and his angels, but without God's mercy the destiny of all mankind would be to join them for eternity there.

I grew up on the shores of Lake Erie and was able to swim frequently in its cool waters. It was refreshing, especially on a hot summer day. It's hard to imagine taking even a brief dip in a lava pit_ but that's the view I have of hell. There's little more painful than being burned. Even severe sunburn can cause misery, but searing flesh is something else again. More than once when I worked in the steel mill, I was burned by embers that flew from the furnaces and found their way down my collar or into my work boot. I still bear the scars. As a boy, I recall thinking that maybe you'd get used to the heat eventually_ but my experience since then has dismissed that idea_ and that's surely not the picture Jesus portrays. In **Mark 9:47-48** He says that the worm never dies in Hell, implying **the torture never ends**. The word Jesus uses for this place is an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew word for "*Valley of Hinnom*" which was just outside Jerusalem's walls. It had been desecrated by human sacrifices made to Molech. In Jesus' day, it was the garbage dump where waste was burned. The smoldering fires and festering worms made it a graphic and effective picture of the fate of the damned. Jesus says there's unending weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth in Hell_ the prison for all who reject God and His glory.

And there'd be no hope of parole. This is the bad news that no one wants to hear_ but the good news never sounds so good as it does to those who have a clear view that, by God's mercy, they have been spared from such a fate. **This is the picture of God's mercy.** God sent His one and only Son that we should not perish but have everlasting life in heaven with Him. **(John 3:16-17)** Until have this truth clearly in view, we will not even begin to be able to comprehend our incredible indebtedness to Jesus. Through His sacrifice on the cross we have been saved from unending torment in a Devil's hell.

Yet, there is more. God has not only been "*merciful beyond measure*", He has been amazingly gracious. Contrary to popular opinion "*grace*" and "*mercy*" are not synonymous. Grace has been defined as the unmerited or undeserving favor for those who deserve condemnation. **Romans 6:23** also tells us that though the wages of sin is death, "**the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" The word translated "*free gift*" in the Greek is the word for "*grace*." God not only spares us from punishment _ He rewards us. Sinners are saved and secure and set for glory. And **with Grace in view**, the best news of all is made crystal clear

Because of God's mercy displayed on Calvary's hill, we have a home in heaven. We get to live in a beautiful place pictured as having golden streets and jeweled gates. There's no pain or suffering there. No tears or sorrow. No disappointment. Instead, there's unspeakable joy, perfect peace, and love that warms the heart and soul forever; resting **in the arms of Jesus**, united with loved ones who have gone on before. And that's what matters most. We are restored to fellowship with God. Not because we deserved it or earned it. It's only by God's mercy and grace; Grace_ glorious grace.

This is the appeal of the Holy Spirit. This is the motivation Paul knew would give substance to his urging to become a living sacrifice. When we focus on what God has done for us in Christ, we cannot help but conclude that He deserves our love and devotion and all our praise_ our service and surrender for all of our days.

A clear view of God's mercy compels us to give ourselves away_ with hearts and lives abandoned to His call. And if you have taken advantage of that mercy_ as the chorus of a new song by "*Mercy Me*" says,

*"No matter the bumps, no matter the bruises; no matter the scars, still the truth is:
The cross has made_ the cross has made you flawless.
No matter the hurt, or how deep the wound is; no matter the pain, still the truth is:
The cross has made_ the cross had made you flawless."*

Close with prayer