

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

OCT 2023 | ROMANS 12:1-2

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.

Romans 12:1 (ESV)

TRANSFORMED BY MERCY

In his epic letter to the Christians in Rome, the Apostle Paul explains why the gospel of Jesus Christ is essential for everyone, everywhere. He reveals the mystery of God fulfilling His purpose in history. Throughout the letter, it becomes clear that God has always intended to reveal His core nature to all of creation. His nature is Mercy. Before creation, God provided the way to restore a fallen creation and reveal His nature. As Paul recounts the biblical narrative of history, he tells how God chose Abraham's lineage to produce the ultimate Seed that would reverse the curse of sin in creation. As the mys-

tery of mercy unfolds, we see that God has designed that both Israel (Abraham's physical lineage) and Gentiles are consigned to disobedience, thereby needing mercy in order to be restored now and forever. There were many twists and unexpected turns in the way it worked out, and the vast majority of Jews missed the point totally. In fact, for both Jews and Gentiles there had to be a special revelation of grace to be able to see what God had done. Once Paul reached the climax of how the mystery played out, he exploded into exuberant praise for the unexplainable and unsearchable

mercy of God that was displayed in the coming of Jesus as the Messiah and Lord (see Romans 11:33-36).

Then Paul inserts a big "THEREFORE." He begins to show how that incredible mercy plays out in daily life. The work of Jesus is complete. Everything that needed to be done to restore humans to true humanity has been done. It is therefore time to examine how we access the new life purchased by Jesus and experience that majestic mercy in our lives.

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. 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.

Romans 12:1-2, ESV

Since humans are created to live in families and communities, we are hopelessly dependent on them for

the establishment of our own identities and destinies. Every one of us has existential needs to belong, to be loved, and to be needed. We all are plagued by the questions regarding the satisfaction of those needs. When our ancestors Adam and Eve sinned, they became afraid of God and tried to find their place in the world by means other than God's design. The culture that developed around fallen humanity was not conducive to human flourishing. The lies of Satan colored the values of every culture in the world. Various gods and sources of power were presented as the solution to the human cry. But the whole world languished under the curse of idols that promised, but could not deliver, meaning to people. Throughout history when a culture adopted some core values from God's design, there was a measure of flourishing, but the various world's cultures simply cannot meet the need that emerged when sin invaded the created order.

The good news that Paul wrote about is that God has provided a new culture that can replace all the substitutes and humans can again live as they were designed to live.

The gospel declares that we fight the influence of world-culture with the influence of heaven's culture. Jesus brought the kingdom of heaven with Him in His incarnation. He demonstrated how to live in that culture during His thirty-three years on earth. He then provided the means for humans to die in Him and be resurrected to a new kind of life. Through faith in His mercy, we are enabled to embrace the reality of a new culture that invaded the earth. It starts with our admission that it was and is mercy that has accomplished our restoration. God has acted on our behalf to secure our being loved unconditionally forever. He has declared that we as believers in Jesus are the favored people of God. He has gifted each of us to do the work of His body on earth. The picture He paints is one of offering a sacrifice on the altar. Yet Christ has already given the final sacrifice required by the holiness of God. He was the spotless lamb. We are in Him, and therefore we cannot purchase anything further. We are simply the vessels through whom He will complete His mission on earth. Our worship is not about our making sacrifices, but about living out the

freedom that His sacrifice purchased.

Our culture today is being pulled violently in two directions. The traditions we retained from the influence of biblical values are being challenged by another religion called secularism. Secularism is a system of beliefs that qualifies as a legitimate religion, and it is aggressive in trying to eliminate any rivals. All vestiges of Christian culture are under attack. The hope of secularism is a culture with no trace of biblical Christianity. Much of the church, the agent designed to infect the world with the truth of the gospel, has been lulled to sleep by a pessimistic view of the future based on poor theology. Believing in the inevitability of evil's victory, many have chosen to sit it out, waiting for an escape.

Of course, there is also the ever present dualism that has plagued the world since the garden of Eden. The constant attempt to separate the spiritual from the natural has led to naming what God called good, as bad. Dualism would argue that religion is for going to heaven and for being good while the rest of life is about work and living in the "real

world.” The truth of the kingdom of God is that all that God created is good, and everything that people of the Spirit do has kingdom fruit whether it is “religious” or not.

We have also allowed our culture to define the metrics of success. Bigness, loudness, and fame have replaced virtue, truth, and service as foundations of society. Even churches have adopted the metrics of corporate structure. We celebrate our wins in the areas of large numbers, bigger budgets, footprint size of our properties, media presence, and popularity. True worship often has to bow to the demand for entertainment, and body life is seldom celebrated as the way we really grow in faith.

The new culture of the kingdom answers the attacks of secularism, dualism, and any other lie human culture can conjure. It offers us a new reality where Christ sits enthroned at the Father’s right hand. We are forever sanctified as we share the very life of Christ by virtue of the Spirit. We belong to the greatest nation ever conceived and to the very family of God. We are guaranteed to

experience the victory that has already been won by our Lord. We are significant because we are supernaturally gifted to do the very works of God on earth. We cannot be bullied, and we will not be silenced. We are moving slowly but steadily throughout the earth infecting and invading every aspect of society. It is our destiny. God has promised our success and has transformed us by His mercy. We can all live with the knowledge that the best is still ahead.



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