

Sermon Transcript from November 20th, 2016
Transformative Renewal
Pastor Dave Lomas, Reality San Francisco

If you have a Bible, please turn to Romans 12:1-2. So, as we've been going through this year, this is the working definition that we've been using for the Bible: the Bible is a library of writings that are both divine and human that together tell the unified story which leads us to Jesus. This is what we've been talking about all year long. You can go back and listen to the old teachings and unpack this idea more fully. But today, we are in the final series of the year; "The Moral Vision of the New Testament." And it's our hope to answer this question: In light of the story of God which leads us to Jesus, how are we, the followers of Jesus – if you are indeed a follower of Christ – supposed to live in light of this really beautiful story? One, unified story. And as it leads us to Jesus and then we become the followers of Jesus, how then are we to live in light of who God is and what Christ has done? How are we supposed to live?

The last two weeks, Dr. Tim Mackie with The Bible Project has walked us through what he believes is a thesis of the Apostle Paul's writing. The Inclusive Paul and the Exclusive Paul is what he called it. So, I encourage you to go back and listen to those. Tonight, I would like to start a string of teachings in Romans 12, building on what Tim taught us. And I want to start with Romans 12:1-2. So, if you have a Bible, follow along. I will be reading from the NIV.

Romans 12:1-2. Paul, writing to the church in Rome. **"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform 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."**

That is God's Word. Let's pray.

Lord, tonight I have so much hope for our church community as we've gone through this year and I pray that we would live into a Christ-like Christian vision of what it means to live this life out in San Francisco and beyond, God. That our minds would be shaped and renewed by You and by the Scriptures and through this community as we wrestle with the text on not just what it means, but also how we live into it. Deliver us from just wanting to talk about the Bible and not live into the implications of the Bible. Keep us from that. Keep this church from that, Lord. Keep us from unholy lives. The lives that are not devoted to you. Lives that are less than what even You require. That we would offer our lives as living sacrifices to You.

I pray that we would, together as people, give our bodies over to that single sacrifice, that one sacrifice, a life pleasing to You. That's what I pray. I know that those are heavy prayers with a lot of implications. We, myself included, need to be renewed in order to live into that vision. So, I pray that that would begin to happen tonight by the power of Your Spirit. I submit all of my capacities to You and I ask, God, that You would teach us tonight. By the power and the strong name of Jesus we pray, amen.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Read this with me.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Hold that verse in your mind. Think about it again. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Now, as you hold that verse in your head, let me read to you the Oxford Dictionary international word of the year that just came out last week. It barely beat out "fear of clowns." I don't know what that means, it just did. But, this is the word of the year: Post-truth: a situation in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

The international – both U.K. and U.S. – Oxford Dictionary word of the year, and they choose a word that captures the cultural moment every year. Last year it was the smiling/crying emoji. So, that was the word of the year last year. It was an emoji. Anyway. They always try to capture the cultural moment through a word. And this is the word here. Now, listen to this with post-truth in mind:

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

The question I think this brings up is, "Can you be wrong in what you hold to be true?"

Could your rants on social media be wrong? Could your biases be wrong? Could your instincts be wrong? Could it be that what you and I need only God can give? A transformation by the renewal of our minds. Could it be that what we really, really need – in the cultural moment that we find ourselves in – only God can give us collectively. Only God can give us. And that is what we need. We need a transformation of our minds by the renewal of our minds. We need to be made new.

I would like to talk, tonight, about how if we are not under the renewing power of God we will easily slip into some kind of post-truth. And don't hear this as a political statement. It's too easy to dismiss if you hear it as a political statement. Hear this as a reality of our current cultural environment. Conservative or liberal, democrat or republican, socialist or capitalist. It doesn't matter. We're all malleable and will become like our surroundings. All of us will take on our surroundings unless there's an intervention, and we all desperately need an intervention.

I feel it personally. I feel the gravitational pull in my soul to become like my surroundings. I always have. I was just reflecting on this over the last couple of weeks that the way that I think is different than the way I thought when I – I was born and raised in Bakersfield, California, which is the valley. And it's not that far away, but it's very far away – that kind of thing – from San Francisco. And me, even as a pastor, I have a way of when I move into a place, into a city, I kind of take on – I remember when I lived in Santa Barbara for a while, all I thought about was surfing all the time. Like, I just became like the thing. And then when I came to San Francisco it was like I become like my surroundings.

And we do this without even thinking. It's like we imbibe our culture. So, this passage from a book written in the 50s about the Billy Graham crusade in San Francisco haunts me. This quote haunts me. I've shared it with you before and I'll read it to you again.

"The church," it says, and this book was written in the 50s, "has not been situated on the side of the Gospel against its environment."

By the way, this is about San Francisco in the 1950s.

"The church has not been situated on the side of the Gospel against its environment. Too often it has been quietly absorbed by its environment. Thus, one honest present-day minister of a large city church has suggested that what pastors have done for San Francisco may not be as significant as what San Francisco has done to the pastors."

That haunts me. It could be that after seven years of ministering in San Francisco, after twenty years of ministering in San Francisco, what is more significant is what San Francisco does to me versus what I have done to San Francisco. Like, I could be more changed by it than I change the city I'm in. But, this is not just the case for ministers and pastors, this is the case for all of us and it's the case for everyone everywhere. Our surroundings deeply shape what we believe, what we value, where we eat, what we listen to, what news channel we watch, etcetera. So, the question is, "Is there a way to get above all that?"

Is there a way to get above it? Is there a way not to conform to the pattern of our world, but be transformed by God? Is there a way to be transformed by God? Is transformation into the likeness of Jesus a thing? Is that possible? Can we become like Jesus? Can we live like Jesus? Can we become people who love like Jesus, who act and react like Jesus, who challenge like Jesus? Is transformation like that possible?

The Apostle Paul, as well as the witness of the rest of the New Testament writers, say "yes." This is possible. To become, to act and react like Jesus is possible. But, here's the thing. And I want you to write this down. This is so important. It doesn't happen automatically. It doesn't come automatically. Would someone just write that down or someone say, "Tell me more," or something? I want to wrestle with this for a second. Like, it doesn't happen automatically. You do not become like Jesus in the way you act and react and behave and love automatically. And the reason why I can say that – you're like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Wait, wait. The Spirit of God..."

No. The reason why I say that is this: what Paul is saying here in verse 2, the very reason

why Paul is writing this, he is assuming that unless you are transformed, you are automatically conformed. Unless you are transformed – the Greek word is where we get the word "metamorphosis." I don't know the Greek word, but that's our word for it. Metamorphosis.

Paul says, "Unless you are transformed from the inside out, completely changed, unless you give your life over to transformation, you will automatically conform to the age," or he says, "to the spirit of the world or your surroundings."

You will automatically conform to the patter of the world unless you are transformed. Unless you are transformed, you will automatically conform to the newspaper you read or the news you typically read, the news channel you typically watch, the people you surround yourself with, the voices you listen to, music or otherwise. Unless you deliberately submit your life to the transformative power of God, you will automatically conform to these other voices. And by automatically, I mean that no one typically sits down and teaches you this stuff and argues you into it. No one argued me into loving coffee culture when I moved to San Francisco. Like, I was really content with Starbucks when I lived in Bakersfield. Very content.

Someone didn't sit me down and go, "Listen, Dave."

It's imbibed. It's absorbed. It's like the opening parable of David Foster Wallace's commencement speech about two young fish swimming along in the morning and an older fish passes by and says, "Good morning, boys. How's the water?"

And then the younger fish swim on for a bit and then one eventually turns to the other and asks, "What the heck is water?"

It's like that. It's so around us that we don't even see it. It's imbibed in our culture. No one sits us down and says, "This is the way that we act here." It's just imbibed in our culture. Let me give you one American example that's kind of silly, but I think it's important. No one taught you how to be a consumerist. I don't think someone came along and offered you a detailed argument for why stuff will make you happy. No one said, "Buy all this stuff. It'll make you happy."

You don't think your way into consumerism. It's quite the opposite. When you think about consumerism long and hard enough, you realize how insane it is. Rather, we are formed by our cultural practices to become consumers. We are formed by the cultural air and the cultural environment and our cultural liturgies that teach us that we are consumers, we are the sum of the things that we buy and things that we have and the things that we want. And until there is a deliberate renewal that takes place around our consumerism, we will be under its power without knowing it. And sometimes, we will even baptize it in Christianity by saying, "Consuming is good as long as you're consuming Christian stuff."

And we baptize it. Now, this is one small example, but this is what the text is talking about. Unless there is transformative renewal, we will become like our political surroundings, our biases will be affirmed, our lives will look way more like the spirit of the age – and that could have some nuance depending on what part of the country you live in – rather than like our Lord Jesus.

The goal, the hope of the Christian life is that we would become like Christ. That we would become like Christ in the way that we act and react. That we would become like Christ in the way that we have compassion, in the way that we show love, in the way that we show truth, in the way that we live into truth. Like, we would become these kind of people. That's the hope of the church, that we'd be salt and light. Now, the question maybe is, "How can we come under the transformative renewal of God? How does that happen with us?"

Let's look at the passage before us. It says in Romans 12:1:

"I urge you, brothers and sisters,"

Whatever's happening here, Paul is using strong language. He's like, "I urge you. This needs to happen. This needs to happen." And he puts a "therefore" in there. "Therefore, I urge you."

Because of all the things that I've shared from chapters 1 through eleven, this is the way that we respond to this. This is the way that we live into this. This is the other side. All those other things were indicatives. Things that are true about you and about Christ. And

these, now, are the imperatives, the way that we're called to live into these truths, and they're always balanced.

He says, "I urge you. I want you to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God."

Let's talk about that for a second. This is weird language. When we think about sacrifice, we don't think about things dying. When we think about sacrifice, we're like, "Oh, that was hard to do. Coming to church on a Sunday night, that's like a sacrifice. Like, I could be at home and it was raining today and I could be Netflixing or whatever. But, you know what's a sacrifice? Getting an Uber during surge pricing to come to church. That's like take up my cross. I'm doing it. I'm doing it."

It's like that kind of stuff. And that's kind of what we deem sacrifice. "It was hard to do. Like, I've been reading the Bible most days. It's a sacrifice. I'm going to do it though."

And we kind of think of sacrifice like that. But, that's not what it meant to the first hearers of Romans 12. Both "sacrifice" and "holy and pleasing" were taken out of temple language. Temple in the Old Testament. Things that were sacrificed literally died. These were animals offered to God, receiving, oftentimes, the penalty for our rebellion. We lived and they died and they were devoted and dedicated to God as a sacrifice. They were dead on the altar. This was a part of Old Testament ritual and practice. So, things that were sacrificed went on the altar, were cut, bled out and died. So, he calls us a living sacrifice, which is an oxymoron, by the way.

Because things in their mind, it wasn't like us saying living sacrifice. "That means I'm going to be alive but I'm going to do things that are hard. It's going to be a sacrifice, but I'm going to do it."

That's not what this word meant. It meant things died. So, to be a living sacrifice was an oxymoron. You would read that and kind of maybe laugh at it. You'd read it and go, "That's pretty funny. That's a good one. How can things that are dead be alive?"

But then, he uses the word "living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God." "Holy," this again is borrowed from temple language in the Old Testament. Things in the temple – the temple was this beautiful, ornate building that everything that went on inside this building was the center of Israel's faith in God. And God dwelled there and everything that happened there, everything in there had to be holy. Every single thing had to be anointed with oil and set apart only for holy use, not profane use. So, if you had a candle light, you couldn't use that candle light in your house. That would be profane. It's only devoted to the things of God.

So, you would take a candle stick and you would take it in the temple and you would anoint it with oil and go, "This is devoted to God. This is only for the service of God."

And the clothes the priests wore were devoted to God only for the service of God. And when priests went into there, they would anoint themselves. "My whole body is to be in the service of God. I am holy."

Meaning, "I'm set apart for the things of God."

So, Paul borrows both of these things. He borrows sacrifice (things that are dead) and holy (things that are devoted to God) and he says, "You guys," – us, followers of Jesus – "are to be a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God."

Now, this is what he means by that. Living sacrifice is an oxymoron, but where would Paul get the idea of a living sacrifice? Who was sacrificed for the sake of others and yet lives? Jesus. Who was dead but is now alive? Jesus. So, he borrows this idea of something that has been devoted and committed to God and died and then comes back to life. Paul's whole way of seeing the world is now in the pattern of Jesus. I go from death to life. This is baptism, right? This is people that go under the waters of baptism and die and come up and resurrect and say, "I'm new in Christ. This is the pattern of baptism. This is the pattern that Paul says that I have went from death to life. Paul is saying, like Jesus, "We offer our bodies as dead to something..." – we have to die to something. Sacrifice means dead to something.

We are dead to sin and the old pattern of this world, but we're alive to God and the things of God, and our entire lives are now to be holy. That is, to be set apart in everything that we do. Mundane stuff, super great prayer times with God and with other stuff. Everything we do is to be devoted to God as holy. So, our whole body is not just something that is

dead to sin but alive to God, but is something that I use all of my members – my hands and my mind and my eyes and my nose and my mouth and my feet – every instrument of my body, I use it for the service of God now. This is the life. This is how Paul sees the followers of Jesus.

He says something earlier. This language here is just borrowed from what he said earlier in Romans 6. Let me read this to you. So, this idea is not new for Paul. He's actually just repeating something he said earlier. So, he says this in Romans 6:11:

"In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

There's that dead but alive thing.

"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."

Don't let sin reign in your body. When there is sin in your life, as soon as you recognize it, cut it off, repent from it and turn away from it.

"Do not offer..." – I love this part – **"...any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life."**

So, when you show up with your body on Monday morning when you wake up, when you go out on a Friday night, when you're out on Saturday, every single thing that you do, show up with every instrument of your body, every capacity of your body, every member of your body. Don't let it show up to be instruments of unrighteousness. But, submit every part of yourself as an instrument of righteousness. So, that means your hands, the things that you do with your hands. May they be things done in righteousness. The things that you do with your mind, the things that you do with your feet and your body. Think of every member of your body, that they would show up for righteousness.

He says, **"For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but you are under grace."**

This is where the idea of "living sacrifice" and "holy and pleasing" come together for Paul. These two things come together. But, let me ask you since I have you here and I have your attention. How have you offered any part of your self as an instrument of sin this week? Wrongdoing? Crime? Hate? Lust? Indifference? Greed? All of these are forms of wickedness, and I trust the Spirit of God to show us in a gracious way, in a good way that you showed up with your attitude, you showed up with your hands, you showed up with your eyes with lust or with hate or with indifference or with crime. And these are things that need to be confessed and turned from. These are not the kind of people that God is making us into, and we just have to recognize that.

And the reason Paul says all of this is that he assumes, as a follower of Jesus, we have to grow out of patterns. There is room here to grow out of these patterns. There is room. Paul is saying, "Renew your mind. There is room for us to move away from these patterns by offering parts of ourselves as instruments of righteousness."

And we have to be reminded and practice turning over our whole lives to God as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to him. But, I think maybe the biggest question is how do we know what is pleasing to God? How do we know what's pleasing? I mean, we're supposed to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. How do I know what's pleasing to Him? Do I just say, "God, I want to use all of my body to please you?"

But, what if the things I'm doing with my body, what if the things I'm doing with my mind that I think are good and okay are neither according to God? What if the things that I'm doing with my hands, I'm like, "I think this is a good thing," but God's like, "It's not a good thing."

What about the things that I'm doing with my mind and I think that they're okay but God's like, "Those are not okay." How will we know? Romans 12:2 again.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Listen. Look at this next sentence.

"Then..." – once we've done this – "...you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

And here we are again. Paul assumes, this text assumes that we are transformed by the renewing of our mind. So, what does that mean? Once we are transformed and once we are in the process of transforming, then there's a possibility – it is completely in our grasp – to know what God's will is for our lives, for the life of our church, for the life of the world. Like, what do You want, God? What do You desire from me, God? It's possible to know once we've given ourselves over to a transformed mind.

So, what does that mean? What does transformed mind mean? What does that even look like? One commentator writes this:

"If all the exhortations contained here could be boiled down to their essence, they would be reduced to the words 'give yourselves wholly to God, do not be shaped by the old world order. But, let new thought patterns transform your life.'"

Let new thought patterns transform your life. That's how this interpreter interpreted that. That's how this commentator interpreted that. Let new thought patterns – new thought patterns. Renewal of your mind means to have new thought patterns. I asked Tim Mackie this last week when we were hanging out together, "How would you interpret Romans 12:2?"

And he said, "Get your self into a new mindset."

Because, I think what Paul is saying here is, "Get yourself into a new mindset."

So, have a renewed mind or new thought patterns or get yourself in a new mindset. I mean, this is what we're called to do. This is what we're told to do. This is what we're invited into. And it's easy to understand that we always have certain ways of thinking. We have certain ways of thinking that we need to come out of. And sometimes, someone needs to wake us up to come out of it. "Why do you think that way?"

I mean, I still shampoo my hair. There's no reason to shampoo my hair. But, I do and I don't know why I do. It's just still a thing that I do. I did that today. Like, I don't know why. I mean, last time I took Ash somewhere and she had a meeting and I dropped her off and I was just walking around and I walked into a place and bought shampoo and she's like, "What is that?"

I'm like, "It's shampoo."

"Well, for who?"

"For me."

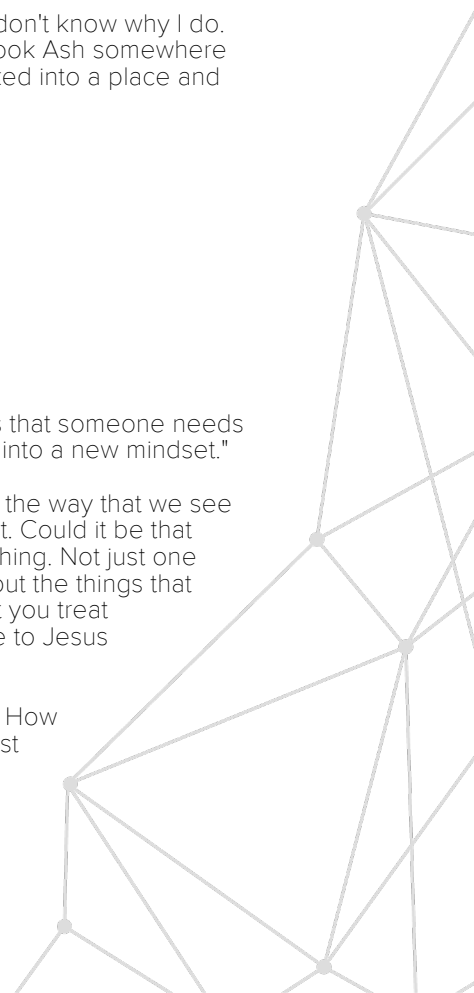
"Why? That's like buying shampoo for your arm. It just doesn't make any sense at all."

I'm like, "Well, that hurts. That's deep. That hurts a lot."

I don't know why I do it. I don't know. And we have these things that we do in our lives that someone needs to wake us up to. Like, "No. You need to change how you do that. You need to come into a new mindset."

We need new thought patterns around things. We need new thought patterns around the way that we see food and drink and gender and sexuality and shampoo and everything. All of it. All of it. Could it be that God wants to transform your mind around the way He thinks about everything? Everything. Not just one thing. Not just money, but everything. About anger, about the way that you spend, about the things that you say, things that you say about other people when they're not around, the way that you treat other people when no one's looking. Like, is there a possibility that submitting your life to Jesus means He wants you to rethink everything?

This is what the invitation to a new mindset is. So, how do we get into a new mindset? How do we develop new thought patterns? How do we renew our minds so that we can test and approve what God's will is for our mind?



Well, "mind" here translates a word that is used to mean "a person's practical reason" or "moral consciousness." And now we're back to our title. "The Moral Vision of the New Testament." Paul and the text is inviting us to transform our moral consciousness; the way that we see morality and ethics as a community. The followers of Christ are to adjust their way of thinking about everything in accordance with the newness of their life in God. So, everything at this point – everything – is to be rethought. We rethink everything. This does not happen automatically, but it also doesn't happen overnight. I don't think we could hack our way into Christ's likeness. We can't go, "Oh, I know they did that for centuries, but we have a new way of doing it. We completely hacked being like Jesus and this is way easier than it was then."

It's still this long, lifelong process by which we give ourselves over to resemble more and more and more the way God wants us to think. It's still us submitting. And this is what we need. This is what I think this requires of us. This is what I think this requires of us as a community. I think this requires authority and community. Community and authority. This is what it requires of us. We must make decisive moves toward God and the Scriptures and the church community and that being the authority in our lives. I know that by saying this I've lost most of the room, because that's so scary. Like, "You're telling me that I'm going to submit my life to God," but then God's kind of like this open-ended like, "Okay, I know who He is, but how do I submit myself to God individually?"

Well, you have to submit yourself to the Scriptures and you submit yourself into the Jesus community of God. And you submit your life there and then you make that the authority; you make God your authority. You make God mediating His authority through the Scriptures and through the church community. And I know that is so scary because we love our autonomy. In some ways, it is our love for our autonomy, our freedom that has created a post-truth situation. A situation in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. In some ways, when someone appeals to our emotion or the things that we already know to be true, we think, "They're the authority in our lives," but really you're just the authority in your life and you like what they said.

We love our freedom. And as Americans, I'd say we love our freedom probably too much and we have a wrong idea of what freedom is as Christians. As American Christians. All freedom means in the Scriptures – and we love it. We sing, "Freedom reigns," or whatever. We sing the stuff. Like, "Freedom. That's so good. I love freedom."

All freedom means is that you've shifted allegiances. You are no longer slaves to sin, you are now slaves to Christ. You're free from sin, but your bondage is bondage to Jesus. But, Christ is the truth. Christ is a good Lord. And we shift our allegiance. I don't just say I'm free from everything. Freedom in Christ means I'm free from sin and I'm now a slave to Jesus and Jesus is a good Lord. He's a good Savior and He is a good leader and His Church, I trust it to lead me. He's the only one, Jesus is the only one who can rule your life without destroying your life. Everything else that seeks to control us will destroy us. All of us, if left to ourselves, we're tyrannical and we're all a little bit insane. Like, we are. We keep doing the same thing over and over and over and over again and thinking, "Well, this time it'll be different."

And what we need to do is be renewed by Christ. And we have to relinquish autonomy a bit. We have granted authorities that are less than adequate to control and shape us and it's eating us alive. Some of us, it's eating us alive. And we have to give ourselves over to the one who loves us and we need authority and community to get us through that. And so, let me come back to this phrase in verse 1.

We need authority and we need community. We need God's authority and we need God's community to hold us accountable, to draw boundaries around our lives, to wrestle through the implications of the truth together. We need all of this stuff. But lastly, I want to come back to verse 1, because all of this is in view of God's mercy. Look at verse 1.

Romans 12:1: **"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy..."**

The text here says everything that we just said has to be, must be viewed through the mercy of God. And the mercy of God is basically the Gospel package for Paul. It's like everything the Gospel is. The mercy of God is everything that he's talked about in chapters 1-11. It's the mercy of God unpacked through the story of God as creator and redeemer. It's what God has done in Christ to redeem the world, the whole world. To redeem us and then also to create a multiethnic, redeemed people of God; those that have chosen to come under the Lordship and Christ's saving work are brought into this multiethnic, redeemed people of

God.

The mercy of God has in view Christ's sacrifice, taking our place on the cross. It has in view Christ's forgiveness, cancelling our debt of sin. It has in view Christ's redemption, bringing us into the family of God and making us into the new humanity. It has in view Christ's mercy, loving us while we were far off and enemies of God. In view of all of that – and this is what I love about it. This makes it to where these words don't crush us. Because, when I just say, "Guys, renew your minds. Submit yourself to authority."

We can walk away crushed. All of this, Paul says, "I see all of this through the filter, the lens of God's mercy."

View it all through the Gospel. View it all through what God's doing in our lives. View it all through the power of God to while we were far off and enemies of God, Christ came after us and gave His life for us. View it as God has been working in humanity to bring about His redemption since the beginning of time. View of it in terms of God is the creator and the sustainer of all of life. View it as God is the one who will bring about justice in the end and He will right all wrongs. View all of this in light of that. View this in light of the fact that God is patient with you, that God knows your life and He knows that if you feel completely wrecked because you feel like your body is useless because it has been so abused and you're not the one who abused it, someone else abused it, and you feel so used and so abused, this is viewed through the life of Christ sees you and He wants to redeem you and He says, "If you're in Christ, you're a new creation. The old things have gone. Behold, all things have become new."

In light of all that, in view of all of that, offer yourselves to God. "Offer your bodies" is active. That's us showing up. But, what's great about this passage is the transform part is passive. So, when Paul says, "Offer your bodies to God as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing," offering our bodies is us actively saying, "Here's my body." But, "be transformed," that is passive. Meaning, we are not the actors in that command. We are the recipients of transformation. So, when Paul says, "Be transformed," he is saying, "God transforms us. God is the actor. We are the ones being acted upon."

So, I'm not asking you to muster up transformation tonight. I'm not saying, "Submit your lives to God and then I need you guys all to be transformed."

God does that work. That is what the tense of this word means in Greek. It's like God is the one that's transforming. God is the actor. He brings transformation and we are commanded to be ready to receive transformation. We are called to be in a position. A good example is like a catcher and a pitcher. Like, the catcher is ready to receive that pitch. We are to be ready for God to actively bring transformation in our lives. And the way that we position ourselves is by offering our bodies over to God. And this is the beauty of the good news of Jesus Christ. We do need to put work in. Indeed. We need to show up with our bodies. We need to show up every single day and commit our lives to Christ every single day. But, our work is rooted in God's grace and the real work of transformation is done not by us but by God in us.

So, we have this beautiful symbiotic relationship with our own transformation. We show up and God does the work. We show up and God does the work. And we give ourselves over to the practices of God. Like, the practices of being Christ-like. We give ourselves over to that. So, I challenge you this next week, as you are on break and you're going into Thanksgiving, that you would give yourself over to one practice maybe that you have lost touch of in this busy city – in this very tactical, carnal, opulent city – that you would give your self over to the practice of silence. Maybe you haven't done that in a long time. The practice of meditating on a Psalm. The practice of interceding and praying for someone. The practice of fasting. Whatever that thing is that you just have maybe lost touch of, maybe you haven't done any of those things, that this week that you would step into like, "I'm going to step into showing up with my body to God to start placing myself in a practice arena so that God can start transforming me. I'm going to give God time to transform me. I'm going to set that time apart."

I want to encourage you guys this next week to live into that sort of thing. But, as we close and as we move into a time of response, let us collectively, together, offer our bodies as one sacrifice. Because that's plural. "Bodies" is plural, but "sacrifice" is singular. Let's offer our bodies together tonight as one sacrifice to God as a church, one church, as we receive communion, as we pray for one another, as we kneel in confession or repentance or adoration or whatever it is that draws you forward. Let's respond together.

And some of us need to come forward and just, "God, I've shown up with this member of my body as an instrument of wickedness and I confess this to You and I confess this gap

between where, Lord, You want me and where I have been. And I ask that by grace You'd bridge the gap and that You would forgive me of my sins and You would cleanse me from all unrighteousness."

And if you kneel, tonight, a sinner, by God's grace you will stand a saint; you will stand forgiven. Christ is faithful and just to forgive us of our sin when we confess. So tonight, let's move into confession, let's move into repentance. That's it. God, we want to present our bodies as a church as a living sacrifice to You and we want to see the transformation of a renewed mind and what it would do to bear on our community and our city.

Let's pray.

Thank You, God. Thank You, God, for Your grace. Like, "In view of God's mercy," that phrase is so beautiful. Thank You for that phrase. In view of everything that You've done in Christ, in view of all of Your mercy, that You've seen us when we were far off from You, that You saw me when I was in rebellion and I was using drugs and I was just so far away from You that You went after me. Just so many stories around this room about how You've gone after people in Your loving kindness and draw them to Your self. Thank You for that.

In view of that, it's just right that we would worship You. It's just right that we'd give You our lives and say, "You've redeemed my life. My life's not my own. I've been bought with a price. I'm going to honor God with my body."

Like, that's just good and proper. That's right, true worship. So I pray tonight that as we worship in song, that's just a small part of our worship, to worship in song. We do it in a response to how good You are and how beautiful and great You are. I pray for those in here who feel so tired because of sin. Sin done to them or even sin they've committed and like David, he said, "When I didn't confess, my bones cried out and my body ached."

I pray for those that feel that. That even in their physical body, because maybe they just have done this so many times they're like, "I'm just not going to confess this again. I'm just so tired of it." And it's just eating them away when we've given ourselves over to things less than You, God, that are controlling us, that are destroying us. I want to pray, Lord, that tonight You would take Your rightful place as Lord and Savior. Rule us, God. We need You. We want to come under Your authority and Your power. So, lead us Lord, we pray, as we respond to the Living God. In Jesus' name, amen.